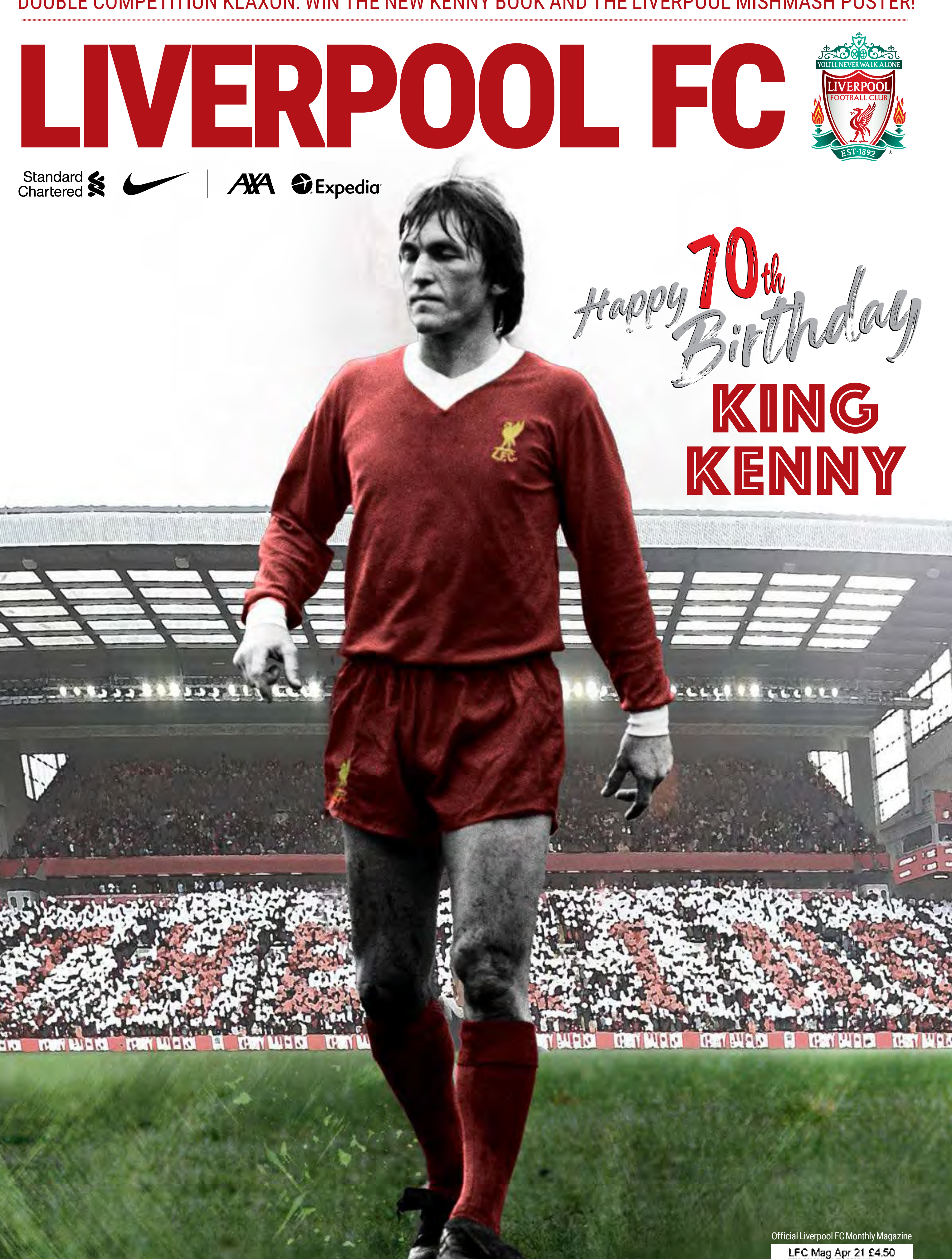
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CONTENTS

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L.F.C.

MO MISSES BY A MILLIMETRE!

Even the commentators – and the fantasy crowd – thought it was in! For once, though, Mo Salah wasn't on the scoresheet for Liverpool but he came so close with this effort at Sheffield United. A fine move involving Roberto Firmino, Curtis Jones and Andy Robertson ended with Salah slicing his far-post effort just the wrong side of the post with his right foot. His expression says it all.

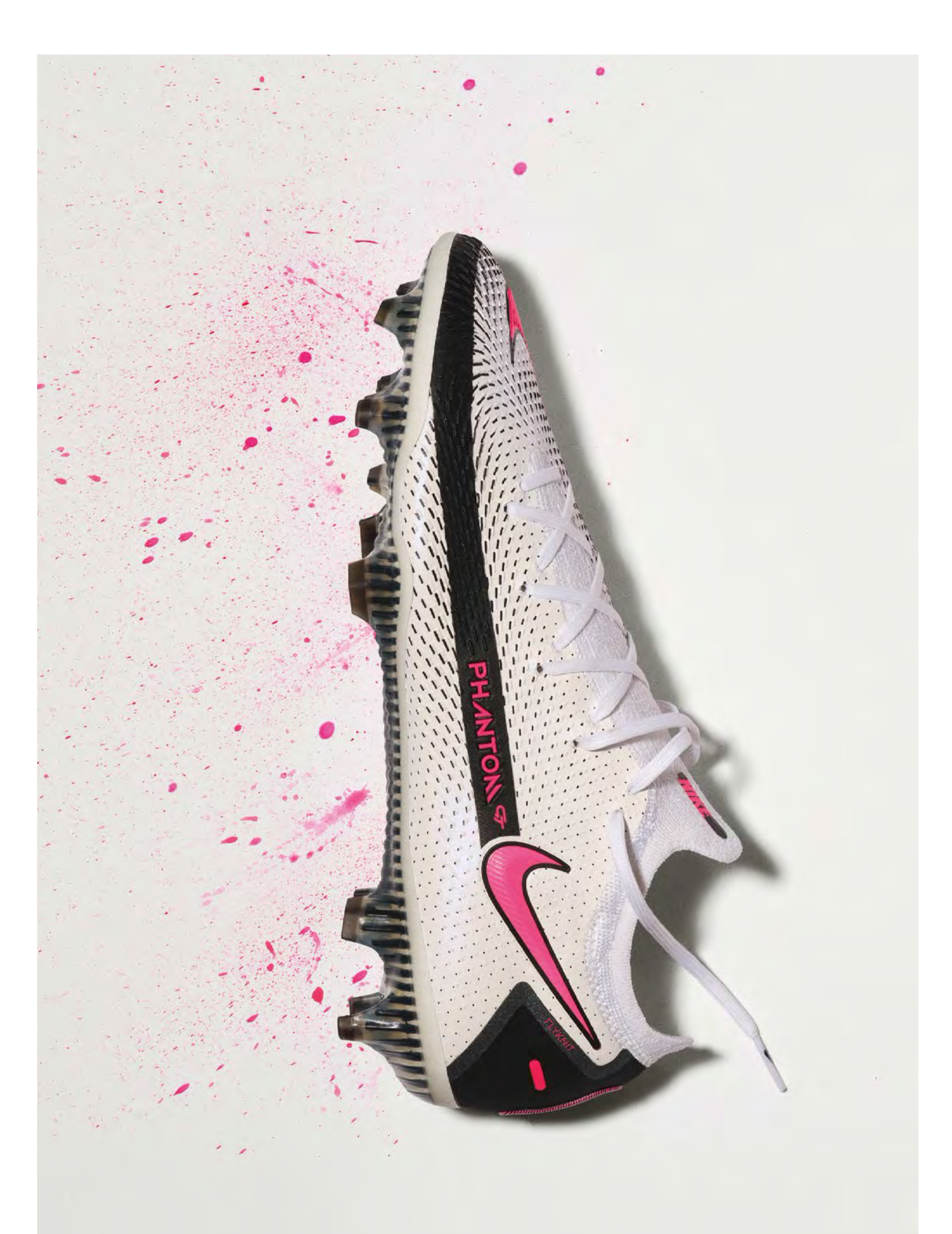




THE SAINT: A LIVERPOOL LEGEND

Ian St John will forever be remembered as the man whose winning goal against Leeds United at Wembley on Saturday 1 May 1965 ended Liverpool's long, long, wait to win the FA Cup. Here he shows his medal to a fan through the window of the train on the way back home, with that beautiful trophy on display too. Signed from Motherwell aged 22 four years earlier for a club-record £37,500, the Saint was a force of nature, fearless and first into the challenge, the perfect foil to the slicker strike-play of Roger Hunt. As one fan posted on social-media after the sad news broke, Shanks will be there for him with open arms. YNWA.


FIRST


PHANTOM
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THE LION OF BAMBALI

Behind Sadio Mane's super-friendly smile is a majestic mentality to help this Liverpool team regain its roar







Interview: Chris McLoughlin

To say that Liverpool's Premier League season hasn't gone as well as it did in 2019/20 is a bit like saying a lion isn't scratching as well after losing his claws.

Whereas the Reds were roaring their way to a league title this time last year, now they are back in the pack, hunting for a top-four finish. It certainly wasn't what we had all hoped for, but an unprecedented central-defensive injury crisis, Anfield missing its twelfth man, individual dips in form and some dubious decisions are among a multitude of contributing, well-debated factors that have set Liverpool back.

Yet while there is disappointment, there must also be perspective – something Sadio Mane most certainly has. Talk of 'struggling' in the Premier League when you're in contention for European qualification is a world away from the struggle that Sadio faced to become a footballer in the first place.

Raised in Bambali, a small village on the banks of the Casamance River in a remote part of southern Senegal, he ran away from his home, his family and even his country to pursue his dream of becoming a footballer.

Had he stayed in Bambali, where he would kick around grapefruit, stones and even pots as it was hard to get hold of footballs, Mane would never have made a career in football let alone be a Champions League and Premier League winner with the Reds.

So when it is said or written that Liverpool are going through everything from testing times and a blip to a catastrophe and a crisis, the 'Lion of Bambali' can put it into true perspective.

"My beginning was really, really tough," he says. "If you want to be a football player but at the same time have no one who can help you, then – not only in football but in anything you want to do – it is really, really complicated. Which it was in my case.

"In my family no one knew football or had been involved in football, so that is why for them it was a waste of time. I always saw myself as a football player one day, but my question was always: how can it be possible? Because no one was supporting me to become a football player.

"In this case you can imagine how difficult it was for me, but I have always said 'a dream is allowed for everyone' and if you keep working it is possible for your dream to come true and you will be successful one day.

"So first of all I left the village when I was 15. I escaped. I ran away to Dakar, the capital of Senegal, and my family tried to find me. In the end they brought me back to the village.

"When I was 17 I said: 'Now I think it is the right time – I won't do anything, I won't study, I want you to do everything possible to help me play football'. But my mum doesn't know anything about football and she didn't care, she thought I was trying to waste my time.

"I wanted success, but I thought: how? You can see how far my village is away and how tiny it is, so to come from there and be a football player is not easy.

"My uncle and some people helped me to go back to Dakar because it was the only solution for them as I was not going to do anything else. I went there for trials at the Academy [called Generation Foot, Senegal's largest football academy] and it was not easy. My mum would call me and ask if everything was good, but she would not ask me about football until I got what I wanted."

By that, Sadio is referring to his move to France to play for Metz in 2011. Spotted by Metz scout Olivier Perrin, it was the opportunity he needed and although it has been said that Mane moved to France with the blessing of his family, he says they only knew about it after he got there.

"I was proposing to go to France but didn't tell anyone, other than my uncle. Only when I arrived in France did I call my mum.

"She couldn't believe it. 'Which France?' she said. 'In Europe', I said. She could not believe it until I signed my professional contract and could do things for her. Now she realises that the impossible can become possible."

EVERY SEASON YOU HAVE A TARGET AND MINE IS TO SCORE MORE GOALS FOR THE TEAM...SO FAR THIS SEASON IT'S BEEN VERY COMPLICATED BUT YOU HAVE TO DEAL WITH IT TO CHANGE IT, TO SHOW YOUR CHARACTER AND ATTITUDE

After 18 months in France then two successful seasons with Red Bull Salzburg in Austria, he became a Premier League player when he signed for Southampton. His record of 25 goals in 75 games for the Saints included four (and a red card) against Liverpool.

In the summer of 2016 he signed for the Reds for a reported fee of £30 million.

Some pundits claimed Liverpool had overpaid (yet never mention it now) but Jürgen Klopp knew what he was getting. He'd tried to take Mane to Borussia Dortmund during his time as manager there and when Sadio knew he wanted him at Liverpool, all other options were taken off the table.

"I got a call from my agent who said he had spoken to Klopp and he wanted to talk to me. I said, 'He wants to talk to me again?' Because I had already had a conversation with him when I was at Red Bull Salzburg. He wanted me in Dortmund but it couldn't happen.

"When he called me again I spoke with him for a bit and we met up one time. He is such a good man – a great man – so when he called me I didn't think twice.

"I just believed in his project, what he wanted to do and what he wanted to do for Liverpool. So I didn't think twice, I just said yes. I was almost going to a close enemy club [laughs] but I stopped everything and I came to Liverpool because it was the right time, the right club and the right manager.

"The choice was very, very easy for me."

Sadio has since played over 200 times for Liverpool and, at the time of writing, has netted 92 goals and contributed 32 assists. He's won four major trophies, scored in a Champions League final, twice in a UEFA Super Cup final, created Bobby Firmino's winner in the FIFA Club World Cup final and is adored on the Kop.

But football is played in the present and Mane feels both himself and the team can – and will – do better than they have in season 2020/21.

"I'm not really, really happy with myself, for sure. It is a









IT IS A REALLY, REALLY TOUGH TIME FOR EVERYONE IN THIS WORLD...ONE-AND-A-HALF YEARS AGO PEOPLE FELT THIS COULDN'T HAPPEN, BUT IN THIS LIFE YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN SO YOU HAVE TO DO WHAT YOU CAN

complicated moment for me, but everything can change and for my own performances I will work hard. We have ten games to play and I am fighting to be happy and I will fight to do everything possible to help my team and be successful.

"As a player every season you have a target. Mine is to score more goals for the team and more than I did last season. So far this season it has been very complicated for myself and the stats say it, but in football it can happen. As a team we can do better than we are doing right now.

"From the beginning we didn't expect this because of our self-confidence with the players that we have and the quality of the team. It has happened differently and you have to deal with it to change it, to show your mentality – which is really important right now – and your character and attitude as well.

"We have to put it all together to change our situation."

Sadio is also someone who sees the bigger picture. The coronavirus pandemic has changed everyone's worlds, including his own. As a devout Muslim he prays five times a day – sometimes more – and was a regular visitor to Toxteth's Al Rahma mosque before lockdown restrictions intervened.

"It is a really, really tough time for everyone in this world. One-and-a-half years ago people said this [coronavirus] couldn't happen, but it has. In this life you never know what's going to happen in the future so you have to do as much as you can.

"For sure, I'm always home because I have to stay safe like everyone else. I call my family and friends to let stress out. I don't always have much time to go to the mosque, but I am someone who usually goes on a Friday as that is when I have the time.

"Right now that is not the case [because of lockdown] and that is completely not normal. But I keep in touch with my family, the mosques – the imam is my very, very good friend – and as soon



as possible we will all see each other. For now we have to stay home and pray at home."

Another man-of-faith in the Liverpool dressing room is Alisson, nicknamed the 'holy goalie' by Virgil van Dijk. Since arriving from AS Roma the Brazilian international has been exceptional, as good as there is in the game, but even the best can make errors.

A couple of goal-costing stray passes against Manchester City and a collision with Ozan Kabak at Leicester put Alisson's form in the spotlight, but there is absolutely no doubt inside the Liverpool dressing-room about the importance of their keeper.

"Sometimes I am surprised when I see people talking about an Ali mistake – and at the same time I understand it is part of football – because even the best goalkeeper in the world can make one or two mistakes," says Mane. "It happens but it is not only Ali, it is the whole team.

"These kind of moments happen to every single player at every single football club in the world. When it happens you just need to keep your head up and always believe you are the best because this happens to the best.

"Ali is a great goalkeeper and someone who is very calm. I can't imagine how many times he has saved us. Maybe we would not be in the Champions League and maybe we would have no trophies without him.

"He is not even *one* of the best – for me he *is* the best in the world and has a great, great mentality. In the dressing-room, Ali's head is always up. There is no doubt about his quality and we know what he is capable of doing.

"We don't even need to say, 'Hey Ali, come on'. People don't know this outside, which is completely normal, but the mentality he has is just incredible.

"It is not one player but the team which is having a tough time, which is a normal part of football. We will keep fighting for everything to change this situation and for sure we will change it.

Another criticism of the Liverpool team this season is that the front-three of Mane, Firmino and Salah are no longer as effective. Failing to score goals in a run of games at Anfield is

ALI IS A GREAT GOALKEEPER AND I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW MANY TIMES HE HAS SAVED US...IN MY OPINION HE IS NOT JUST ONE OF THE BEST – FOR ME HE IS *THE* BEST IN THE WORLD





behind that particular criticism, although having netted over 250 goals – and created over 110 – between them in a little over three-and-a-half seasons, the standards they have set themselves to live up to couldn't be much higher.

It's not a criticism Sadio shies away from – as he said before "the stats say it" – but improving their goals and assist numbers again is something the trio are working on in training as they try to recapture the kind of form that made them the most feared trio in football.

"Because we are here for years and we are successful winning things, people are watching us and trying to make themselves ready for us.

"So now it becomes more and more difficult for us. But like I have said before, football is always about learning.

"Playing alongside these great players is always easy and now we understand each other more. We try to help each other more to score goals and get more assists for the club, which is really important because you have to win games.

"We are working harder every single day to try to make it more difficult for them [opponents] and to make Liverpool Football Club successful."

To say that Liverpool's Premier League season hasn't gone as well as it did in 2019/20 is a bit like saying a lion isn't scratching as well after losing his claws. But claws grow back and with Sadio Mane, the Lion of Bambali, determined to make things better, the Reds' roar will return.

SADIO MANE 2.0

During the 2020 summer transfer-window, Liverpool were linked with a move for Sadio Mane's Senegalese international team-mate Ismaila Sarr.

The Watford winger, who recently turned 23, scored twice against the Reds at Vicarage Road and was the subject of much speculation until Diogo Jota was signed from Wolves. Sarr remains at Watford, but now there is another Senegalese winger who is catching enough attention to have been nicknamed 'Sadio Mane 2.0'.

Krepin Diatta signed for AS Monaco in January for a reported fee of £14 million. The 21-year-old had spent the last three years in Belgium with Club Brugge, playing in the same side as ex-Reds goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, and in 2019 was named as the best young player at the African Cup of Nations as Sadio's Senegal reached the final in Egypt.

Coronavirus restrictions permitting, the postponed 2021 AFCON will be held in Cameroon in January 2022. With Senegal already qualified, Mane and Diatta will be two of the tournament's biggest draws.

So how does 'Sadio Mane 2.0' compare to the original? Liverpool's no10 thinks the new version might be even better than he is. "First of all I want to say he is a great good lad and is like my small brother because sometimes he calls my phone for advice. I try to help him as much as I can. It is normal to try to give this help for your younger brothers who are doing the same job like you.

"He is one of the best, best young players I have played with and I am sure, in a few years, he will come to the Premier League.

"If he works harder and he stays humble, like he is now, then for sure I think he can do better than me. He is going to be a great, great player."




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ADRIAN AT THE READY

The family tragedy that struck Reds keeper Alisson – and hit everyone in the senior squad hard – meant that Adrian was called upon again to deputise in goal in late February. Manager Jürgen Klopp commented: “What a person and what a professional. His attitude and energy hasn’t dropped even half-a-per-cent, despite circumstances that cannot have been easy. This club is fortunate to have him. He contributes so much more than is often recognised.”





VIRGIL STANDS TALL

We may not see Virgil van Dijk in action again this season, but he's been looking fit and well at the AXA Training Ground and Jürgen Klopp recently revealed that he'd considered including the centre-half on LFC's Premier League and Champions League playing-list for the remainder of 2020/21 because "we believe in miracles from time to time." Either way, watch this space next season.

POETRY IN





MOTION

Blistering counter-attack, instant control and class finish with the outside of the boot, but which gets your vote as the best team-goal so far this season: Bobby v Palace or Mo v West Ham?











"THE FINISH IS SIMPLE, THE FIRST TOUCH IS IMMACULATE…THAT IS SENSATIONAL"

Saturday lunchtime kick-offs all the way down in the capital six days before Christmas aren't ideal, especially after a hard-fought, last-gasp home win the previous Wednesday, against Tottenham as it was.

But once the Reds hit their stride at Crystal Palace – and to be fair the hosts had a couple of good chances themselves early on – this became a mini goal-of-the-month competition for the visitors.

In the first half Liverpool scored thrice from three shots on target. This was the third of them, coming on 44 minutes after Takumi Minamino and Sadio Mane had started the scoring.

In a breathtaking counter-attack the Reds won back possession deep in their own half before Roberto Firmino span and sprayed the ball out to Andy Robertson on the half-volley. The left-back surged down the flank as Bobby sprinted ahead and met his precise cross with instant control, flicking it past keeper Vicente Guaita in the blink of an eye.

Former Liverpool midfielder and Sky Sports pundit Don Hutchison later analysed the goal and paused the footage at the point of Robbo's delivery…

"When you see all these shirts flooding forward, it's very easy for someone not like Firmino to take a heavy touch – he's got to take the softest touch you can ever imagine.

"I was explaining this to my lad the other day and what you've got to almost do is have the feeling that you're going to under-hit your touch, because it will arrive exactly where you want it. If you take what we perceive as a 'normal' touch, it will end up being heavy.

"The finish for him is actually quite simple – its a routine finish. It's the first touch that is immaculate and that is sensational from Firmino."

Over on BT Sport another former Reds midfielder, Joe Cole, was equally awestruck: "Look at this touch – outside of the boot – and then look at the desire to get in the box.

"As the ball comes in, I don't think you appreciate how difficult it is to control that ball on the run, put it just there and poke it with the outside of the boot. He's touched the ball in that action-sequence more times with the outside of his boot than his instep – from the halfway-line to the penalty area.

"He's a fantastic player – I love him."

Jordan Henderson, also on the scoresheet, admitted post-match: "We were ruthless today. We took our chances, which is always important. But it was coming, I felt, because over the last few games we've had chances and haven't taken them."

The skipper actually picked substitute Mo Salah's curler as his favourite on a day when Liverpool won 7-0 away in the top-flight for the first time in 106 years. Indeed the Salah strike was also voted by fans as LFC's best goal of December.

As team-goals go, though, this was pretty much perfect. The victory gave Jürgen Klopp the most Premier League wins as Liverpool manager with 127, one ahead of Rafael Benitez.

He called the finishing "clinical" and "at the right moments," adding: "The boys are capable of doing that, although of course it doesn't happen every week. But it can happen and today it clicked."





"WEST HAM WON A CORNER…FIFTEEN SECONDS LATER LIVERPOOL SCORED"

Like Bobby's goal at Palace, this strike came in an away-win in the capital three days after beating Spurs. This time it was the second of a Mohamed Salah double at the end of January at high-flying West Ham, following victory at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium by the same 3-1 scoreline.

Mo hadn't found the net for nine hours and six previous Premier League games but with strike-partners Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino both on the bench, he certainly made amends, the first goal a quick shift and curling finish at the start of the second half, and then this from a breakneck breakaway eleven minutes later.

A West Ham corner was headed clear by Andy Robertson into the path of Trent Alexander-Arnold who hit a first-time, diagonal long-ball to Xherdan Shaqiri over the halfway line, who in turn crossed long and magnificently for Mo to kill the ball and score in two deft touches.

Sky Sports co-commentator Gary Neville purred: "The pass is brilliant but this bit is really special. Right foot, left foot, devastating from Mo Salah."

On MOTD2 later that evening, pundit Eddie Howe analysed the goal thus: "West Ham were actually in a good position from their corner, but this goal is absolutely brilliant. Trent's switch is superb, it enables Shaqiri not to check his stride and hit it first-time…but what a touch and finish from Mohamed Salah."

Not only had Mo now scored nine Premier League goals against West Ham – his best return against a side in the top-flight – he'd also become the first player to score 20-plus goals in all competitions in four consecutive seasons for Liverpool since Ian Rush in the 1980s.

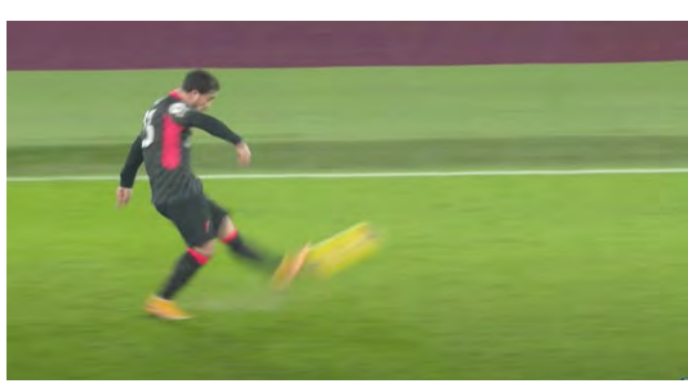
The *Guardian* began its match report like this: "With around a quarter of this match left, West Ham won a corner on the right. Scenting a set-piece equaliser, claret-and-blue shirts piled into the penalty area.

"Jarrod Bowen picked his spot and delivered a curling left-footed cross. Fifteen seconds later, Liverpool scored. Game over, handshakes, thanks for having us."

The *Independent* called it "a work of individual genius contained within one of the moves of the season.

"It consisted of two 40-yard diagonal passes: the first from Alexander-Arnold to Shaqiri, the second from Shaqiri to Salah. From start to finish, there were only four touches between the three of them, the final two seeing the Egyptian control the ball out of the sky with his right foot and clip it beyond Lukas Fabianski with the outside of his left.

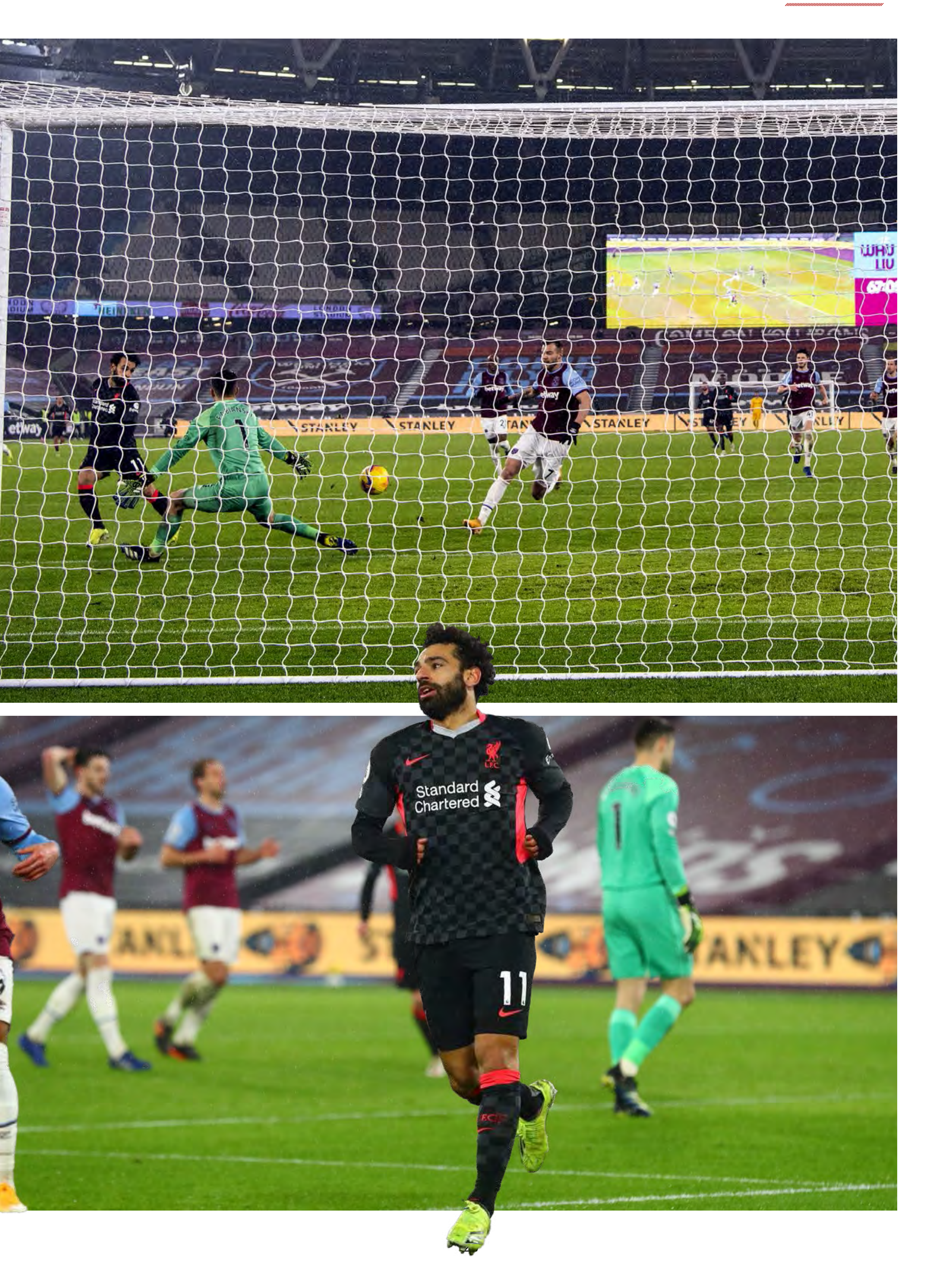
"Simple yet devastating. Efficient and beautiful. Liverpool 2020/21 doing things the 2019/20 way."










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NEVER GIVE UP

Remember the Mo t-shirt? It's the banner this team fights under, says **ROBERTO FIRMINO** – and this season's battle is far from over

IT'S BEEN A TURBULENT SEASON FOR EVERYBODY WITH THE ONGOING PANDEMIC – HAVE YOU FELT PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY TIRED AT ANY TIME?

Of course it's a difficult time for everybody, isn't it? It's no excuse for the bad run we've had though. I've never tried to use being locked down within this bubble to explain our form.

I don't see this as being the problem – it's more to do with this phase we've gone through. Hopefully that's coming to an end now and we need to carry on. It's a difficult moment for everybody but I don't see it as an excuse for us.

HAS IT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE, NOT JUST THE BUBBLE YOU MENTIONED BUT ALSO YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?

No, I've developed and grown a lot. I've become a better father, son and husband. I've grown a lot and I'm grateful to God for this time that has allowed us to become much closer and I'm very thankful for that.

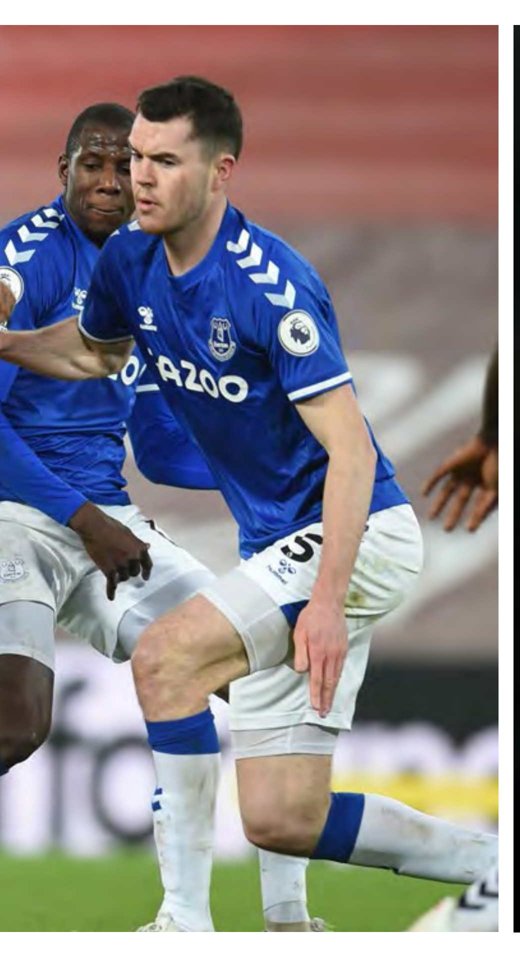
A lot of people have lost relatives and people close to them and are going through a lot of difficulties, but I thank God for everything he has done in my life.

WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE PLAYING WITHOUT FANS AT ANFIELD?

It's strange and in the beginning it was really difficult for me. I wouldn't say that I was dependent upon the fans, but I feel some extra fire with the fans there.

I think it's coming to an end now and soon they'll be back with us cheering us on all game, giving us strength and being like an extra player for us and we'll all smile together.







I REALLY MISS THE FANS – THEY HELP US WITH THE ATMOSPHERE THEY CREATE AND THEY'RE DEFINITELY A TWELFTH PLAYER FOR US – BUT WE KNOW THEY ARE CHEERING US ON FROM HOME

YOU MUST ALSO MISS THE 'SI SENOR' SONG?
Without a doubt – it's additional motivation. I really miss the fans, they help us with the atmosphere they create and they're definitely a twelfth player for us. But we can't use their absence as an excuse. They're cheering us on safely from home during these times and we know they'll be back with us soon to commemorate victories and trophies together, much to our delight.

LIVERPOOL HAVE BEEN SO CONSISTENT IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, SO THE DIP IN FORM MUST HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT...
Yes of course, we demand a lot of ourselves – the players, the coaching staff, the club. Our aim is to play together as a team to win trophies for the club and bring joy to our fans and families.

We demand a lot of ourselves and we know it's not been a good moment, but we have to continue fighting for things to improve. We'll get over it and things will get back to normal.

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS HAS BEEN SUCH A DIFFERENT SEASON FOR LIVERPOOL – WHAT HAS CHANGED?
It's difficult to say. We know that it's not an easy time for the club or for us players. We've had a difficult moment, but we can't give up and we certainly won't give up.

The next Premier League game is always an opportunity to get three points and try to climb the table. We have to do our best and we're working hard every day to turn things around as soon as possible.

MIDFIELDERS SUCH AS FABINHO AND JORDAN HENDERSON HAVE TAKEN STAND-IN DEFENSIVE ROLES THIS SEASON – HAVE THE ATTACKERS TRIED TO HELP THEM WITH LESSONS?
We know what a great loss Virgil, Joe and Joel have been – it's an incredible loss – but we can't be negative. We were really sad to lose them but it happens in football. It's not an excuse and we shouldn't look to use this to justify our form.



THE BOSS IS ALWAYS POSITIVE, NEVER NEGATIVE, AND PERSONALLY I OWE HIM A LOT FOR EVERYTHING THAT I'VE LEARNT FROM HIM – I'M DELIGHTED TO HAVE HIM AS MANAGER HERE AT THE CLUB





High-level players have come in to replace them and give their best in every game and during training sessions. We have to think positively. We know the players will be returning to add to the team and help us during games. We have needed to use the squad and always think positively.

As you've seen, we have central midfielders playing in central defence. We're always aiming to help each other as we are one team. That's what a true team does: helps each other to get the win – something you can't do on your own.

PEOPLE DON'T THINK OF YOU AS AN ORTHODOX NO9…

The number doesn't say anything. I just want to be constantly helping the team. My first thought is to defend and then to help the team with passes and goals. That's what's been happening and I want it to continue like this, to be constantly helping the team.

Of course the fans notice when I don't score and I demand goals from myself as well so I don't need reminding when I don't score. But my first thought is to help the team and hopefully contributing by providing assists and scoring goals as well.

It's hard to describe yourself as a player. I think about the team over the individual first.

WHAT DOES JÜRGEN KLOPP ASK OF YOU AS PLAYERS ON THE PITCH?

There's no secret to it. He's like a motivational father-figure. He teaches us a great deal as well and we learn a lot from him in training.

In games he asks us to do our best as he knows what we're capable of and what each player can do on the pitch. He just asks us to do our best and do what we love, which is play football.

He's always positive, never negative, even after defeats and particularly now with the defeats we've had. He always motivates us and reminds us where we've come from, from when we still hadn't won anything and then started winning things.

He always activates this positivity so that we remain hungry and are always wanting to win. This is great from him and I'm very grateful for it.

YOU CAME TO LIVERPOOL A FEW MONTHS BEFORE HE BECAME MANAGER – HOW IMPORTANT HAS HE BEEN IN YOUR CAREER?

Tremendously important. It's almost as if it had been planned, though it was nothing like that as I arrived a little bit before he did. He even sent me a message when he was on his way saying how motivated he was to come here and work with me.

I already knew him from Dortmund and I'd played against him when I was at Hoffenheim and he was managing Dortmund. So I already knew what he was like and a bit about his background. He deserves everything he's achieved here at the club.

I owe him a lot for everything that I've learnt from him. I'm delighted to have him as manager here at the club.

DIOGO JOTA HAS MADE AN INSTANT IMPRESSION SINCE HE JOINED IN THE SUMMER…

It was a great signing by the club and we players were really


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happy with his arrival. He came to add to the team and showed his quality prior to his unfortunate injury. He helped us with goals by using his intelligence.

I think his most special characteristics are his intelligence and speed, together with this eye for goal that he possesses. He's definitely going to add to the team when he comes back and help us a lot which will make everyone at the club happy.

YOU ARE INTO YOUR SIXTH YEAR AT LIVERPOOL NOW – WHAT HAS BEEN THE HIGHLIGHT?

The trophies. They will stay with us and they are what we work towards. The greatest memories are the titles we've won. I don't have a specific one to mention. All the trophies we've won while I have been here stick with you and I want to continue working hard to win even more here.

YOU PLAYED YOUR 200TH PREMIER LEAGUE GAME FOR LIVERPOOL IN THE MERSEYSIDE DERBY AT ANFIELD LAST MONTH…

Yes, I'm really honoured to have reached this feat of 200 league games in a Liverpool shirt, with such a massive club. It's a huge pleasure to be here and putting on this shirt makes me really happy together with everything we've achieved over the years, winning trophies and bringing joy to the fans and especially our families.

I hope to stay here bringing joy to the club while aiming to improve every day so that I can help the club as much as possible.

ALTHOUGH THIS SEASON HASN'T GONE TO PLAN, YOU'LL KEEP FIGHTING?

Yes, I've never let my head go down, I'm confident, motivated and will never stop fighting. We can't give up. We have to be brave and look ahead, whatever the results have been.

We still have things to play for and we'll fight till the very end and do our best to make our targets a reality.

OVERSEAS PLAYERS WITH 200 LEAGUE APPS FOR LFC

440 Bruce Grobbelaar (Zimbabwe, 1981-94)
358 Gordon Hodgson (South Africa, 1926-35)
322 Arthur Riley (South Africa, 1925-39)
318 Sami Hyypia (Finland, 1999-2009)
285 Pepe Reina (Spain, 2005-2013)
247 Lucas Leiva (Brazil, 2007-2017)
242 Martin Skrtel (Slovakia, 2008-16)
236 Berry Nieuwenhuys (South Africa, 1933-47)
234 John Arne Riise (Norway, 2001-08)
218 Jan Molby (Denmark, 1984-1995)
208 Dirk Kuyt (Holland, 2006-2012)
200 Roberto Firmino* (Brazil, 2015-present)
*correct as of 20 February 2020




Standard Chartered

STRANGER THINGS

A football season like no other has produced matchday images we could never have imagined that we'd see at Anfield or elsewhere





A socially-distanced moment for the manager to take off the mask before kick-off on the playing surface



It's been over a year now since COVID-19 changed the world as we know it, and around nine months since behind-closed-doors football kicked in. It still it takes some getting used to.

From last June stadiums began to be divided into three zones: red, including the pitch and technical areas; amber for the stands; and green for stand concourses, with restrictions on who was allowed to go where and temperature-checks on arrival.

Teams were now able to make five substitutions rather than the usual three and could name nine on the bench instead of seven. There's been deep-cleaning of corner-flags, goalposts and match-balls. No handshakes before kick-off, post-match pitch-side broadcast interviews using boom microphones, and virtual press-conferences.

At Anfield a couple of thousand supporters who were successful in successive ballots were allowed to return for

Sanitising the corner flags brings a whole new meaning to 'keeping it clean'





Work Together.
Stand Together.
Achieve Together.

Find out more at
liverpoolfc.com/RedTogether







December's Premier League fixtures against Wolverhampton Wanderers, Tottenham Hotspur and West Bromwich Albion.

But after the government's announcement at the end of last year that the City Region had been placed in Tier 3 restrictions, and the subsequent national lockdown, LFC reverted to playing games behind-closed-doors. This applied to both the men's team at Anfield and LFC Women at Prenton Park.

Throughout the pandemic the priority has been the health and safety of players, coaches, club staff and not least the local community, with strict protocols in place.

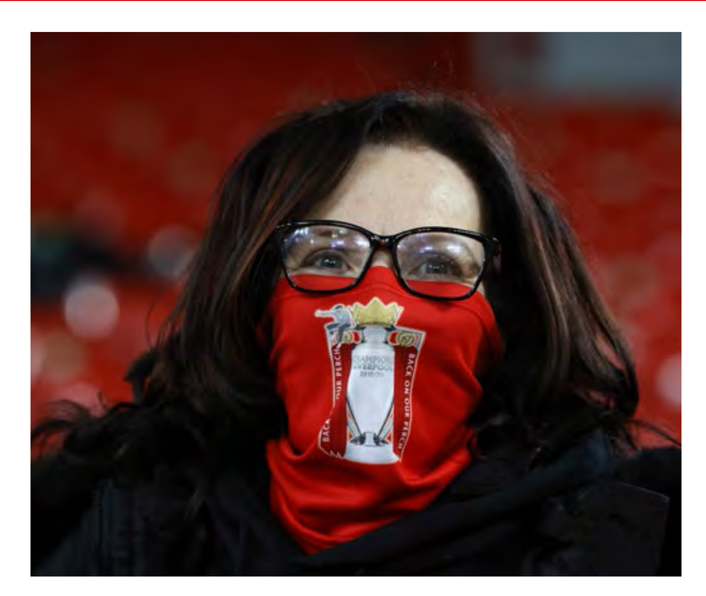
As ever the club continues to work with its city partners, including Liverpool City Council, Merseyside Police and Spirit of Shankly, to establish the most up-to-date health guidance and be in the best possible position to welcome fans back to Anfield while ensuring a safe environment for everyone in attendance.

In his matchday programme notes for the game against Manchester United in January, manager Jürgen Klopp wrote:





Two-metre spacing in the dressing-room, and running out to warm-up in front of empty stands



"The situation in this country and in many areas around the world is very serious now. Football as an industry – plus the players, coaches and staff working within it – is acutely aware of this.

"The word 'bubble' is used to describe the environment we are allowed to work in, but this does not cut us off from the harsh and tragic realities of what is happening. It also doesn't numb the sense of responsibility we rightly feel or lessen the sense of privilege gifted to us.

"I can only speak for my own team and club, but I can tell you we are enormously grateful that we have been given the chance to keep working, despite the necessary restrictions placed on this country and others across Europe and the world."

It's a sentiment that has been echoed by captain Jordan Henderson in his own programme column as Anfield continues to miss the people who make all the difference.

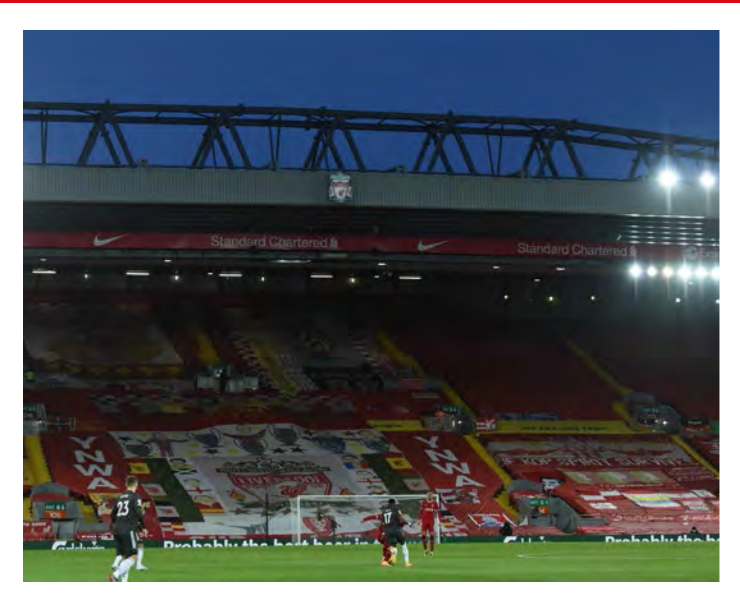
Ahead of the home game against Burnley, the skipper wrote:

A few thousand fans were allowed back for three home games last December











Robbo takes a corner without an audience



"It's at times like this, when results aren't coming as easily as we would like, that I would usually thank our fans for your patience and urge you to get behind us as much as you can.

"That's standard practice for any captain – particularly at a club like Liverpool where the fans play such a crucial role – but we're still having to do without supporters and I'm not going to pretend it's getting any easier on that front, because it isn't.

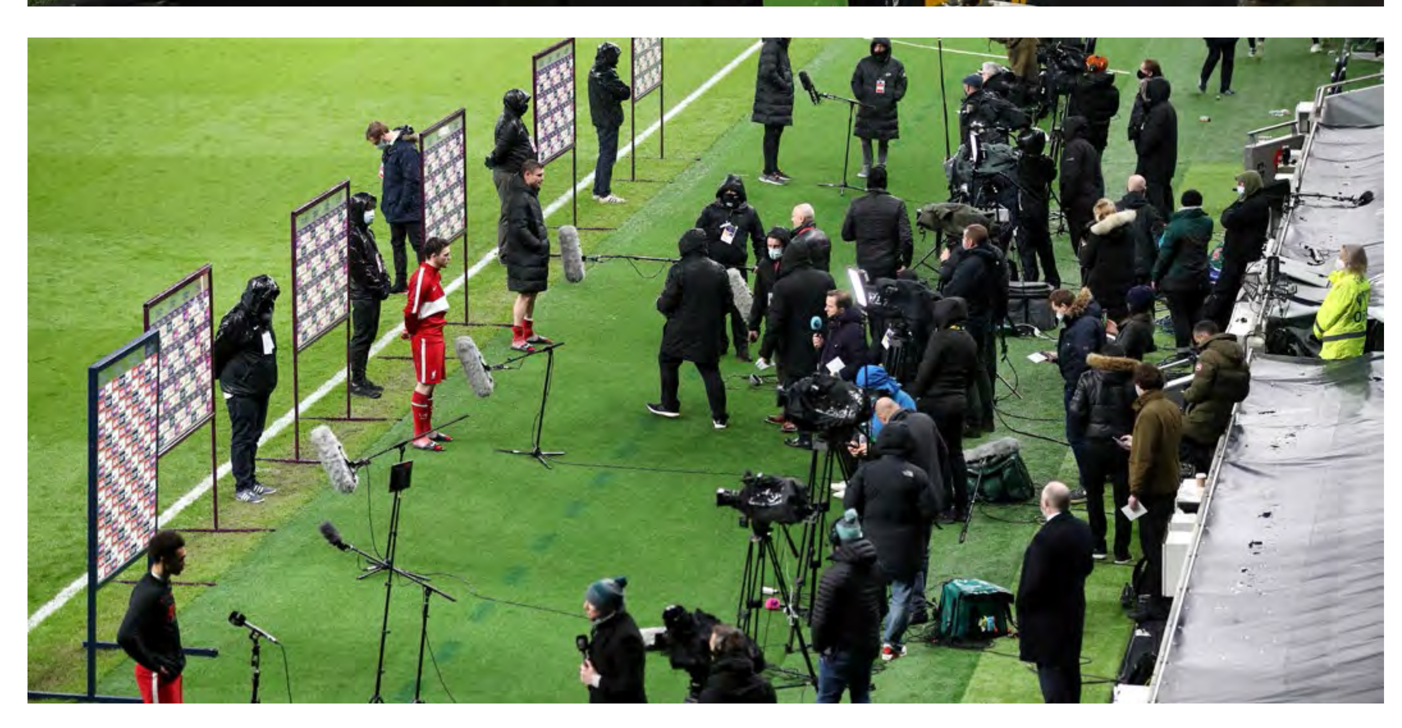
"All I can do is keep on urging all of you to stay as safe as you possibly can and hopefully it won't be too long before we are all back together at Anfield. In the meantime we will keep on playing for you and doing our very best to play in a way that does you proud."

Dreadful though the bigger picture has been, perhaps a football analogy isn't too bad way to look at things. This pandemic is like a bad run of results. At the time it feels like the end of the world, but it won't last forever.

Together we'll get through it and come out the other side.



Post-match interviews just got weirder





TOMORROW WILL BE **A GOOD DAY**



How the club's official charity has responded to the pandemic by continuing to create life-changing opportunities for young people and families

Eagled-eyed fans and TV viewers may have noticed the first team wearing slightly different warm-up tops before last month's Premier League game against Manchester City at Anfield.

On the back was the logo of the club's official charity to celebrate the seventh annual LFC Foundation Day, and although the result on the pitch didn't go the right way, the positive impact off it was a cause for great cheer.

Foundation Day is an opportunity to showcase the positive impact of the charity in the local community and around the world.

Last year the focus was championing the role that children and young people can play in bringing communities together to solve common challenges. While this will always be at the forefront of the Foundation's work, the last 12 months have brought an unprecedented challenge for everyone, not least a huge increase in need and demand for vital support especially in the most deprived communities.

'Unity is Strength' is the name of the scaled-up, coordinated response from LFC Foundation and the club's community team Red Neighbours during these unprecedented times, focused on four key areas: food-poverty, social isolation, physical and mental wellbeing, and volunteering.

As well as appealing for donations, Foundation Day was a way of expressing thanks and appreciation. Among those doing just that was Thiago Alcantara, who may have been a Reds player for less than six months but already feels at home and "proud to be part of the LFC family."

The midfielder added: "Since I joined Liverpool I have been so impressed by LFC Foundation and the work it does in the local community. The support fans give to the charity makes it very special."

All of his team-mates share the same sentiment but skipper Jordan Henderson expressed it best in his voiceover for the Foundation Day's promotional film: "On behalf of Liverpool Football Club and LFC Foundation, I want to congratulate the



LFC family for coming together to help those in need like no other football club can. We have been overwhelmed by the kindness, passion, generosity and resilience shown by our participants, fans, and communities around the world.

"This is Foundation Day. We are Liverpool. This means more."

The matchday programme marked the occasion with a special front-cover and inside was a message from Billy Hogan, CEO of Liverpool FC and vice-chair of LFC Foundation.

"It's safe to say that Foundation Day will be very different this year," he wrote. "Having been a trustee of the club's official charity for the last eight years, I have so many fond memories of these annual celebrations of the terrific work carried out by LFC Foundation – a special matchday each season when we come together to highlight the connection we have with our local communities and our global fanbase.

"Usually we take great pleasure in introducing fans in the stadium to our participants and their families, giving them the opportunity to come to Anfield, stand on the pitch with their idols, and represent the many tens of thousands of young people that LFC Foundation supports each season.



"WE HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMED BY THE KINDNESS, PASSION, GENEROSITY AND RESILIENCE SHOWN BY OUR PARTICIPANTS, FANS, AND COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD"









"Instead today we must find different ways to come together in celebration and acknowledgement of the power of the LFC badge."

This time, although they couldn't be there in the ground in person, some of the dedicated participants on LFC Foundation's programmes were represented by cut-outs behind the dugouts.

Likewise, despite lockdown and social-distancing the club has continued to stay in touch with its local communities. Foundation director Matt Parish explains: "While we are moving many programmes on to virtual platforms, we also feel it's important to enhance our community-response work again in our key areas to help as many people as we can through another very challenging period."

The Foundation's current activity reflects learnings made since March last year. As the UK entered its first national lockdown in 2020 the club entered into a phase of emergency response, working with local authorities, schools and communities and focusing on support for the NHS and key workers, food-poverty and social isolation.

There was a clear need for personal protective equipment (PPE), with hospitals and other healthcare services running low on supplies. LFC Foundation donated 25,000 medically-approved face-coverings to the Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group, an organisation responsible for planning health services for the city.

In turn the face-coverings were distributed for free to local GPs to ensure safe practice in the weeks and months to come.

There was a large printed message on the pitch at Anfield, thanking NHS staff for their continuous hard work and bravery, a tribute coinciding with the nation's applause for frontline staff.

Hundreds of fresh meals were prepared by LFC's professional chefs to provide essential fuel to those who needed it most, including Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service firefighters and officers, North West Ambulance Service staff, and school hubs and community groups supporting some of the most vulnerable people.

NHS and key workers also received 'goodie bags' and 'treat boxes' from the club as a small token of appreciation, as did children and families affected by COVID-19, while LFC Foundation delivered baby clothes and essential items to new mums at Liverpool Women's Hospital.

Around 1,500 Easter eggs were delivered to children's centres, care homes, foodbanks, and school hubs across Merseyside, while 3,500 cookies were baked by LFC staff and delivered to over 300 pharmacies.

The cancellation of matches had a significant impact on North Liverpool Foodbank, which receives around 25 per cent of its donations from matchday collections. The Reds first-team squad and LFC Foundation duly committed to jointly-donating £10,000



per game for the four remaining league fixtures scheduled to be played at Anfield in 2019/20 to ensure the foodbank continued to function.

Food-poverty was also tackled by the Red Neighbours 'Breakfast Clubs to You' initiative. Usually welcoming hundreds of local residents to breakfast clubs at Anfield throughout school holidays, instead it delivered food-parcels to school hubs for distribution to vulnerable families.

In total over the last nine months the club has donated more than £300,000 to the North Liverpool Foodbank and The Trussell Trust's foodbank network across the City Region, as well as providing 42,000 freshly-prepared free meals (1,000 per week) to support local families.

Also last year, to promote positive wellbeing the club sent out postcards with a friendly message, while Reds boss Jürgen Klopp and first-teamers Andy Robertson and Virgil van Dijk took part in surprise calls to older people in the the north Liverpool and Kirkby communities as part of the LFC Connect scheme.

Meanwhile LFC Foundation launched an online 'safeguarding' campaign to help support participants unable to attend their school and community sessions during lockdown, reaching out to address whether they needed someone to talk to, had any worries or concerns.

On a global scale LFC Foundation held its first 'This Means More Challenge' in September, engaging Official Liverpool Supporters Clubs around the world to unite in supporting their local communities and help address the impact of the pandemic.

From Baltimore to Bangalore, Kenya to Kuala Lumpur, branches from five continents delivered a range of community-action activities, with an at-home option if they were unable to go out due to local restrictions.

Club owner and LFC Foundation trustee Linda Henry hailed the "phenomenal connections and work done… The passion, creativity, and kindness came through, showing that being part of LFC really does mean more."

Back home the charity has since received two generous donations, each for £25,000, from The Steve Morgan Foundation and Peter Moore Foundation, helping support to its mental-health projects and COVID-19 response work.

On so-called 'Blue Monday', which in 2021 fell on 18 January and is widely-recognised as one of the most difficult times of the year for many people, the club launched a raft of additional activities under the banner 'Red Monday'.







These included free student mental-health workshops via Zoom, and letters and pictures under the 'Red Pals' initiative to share with care-home residents to brighten their day and show they were not alone during the pandemic.

Most recently Anfield has become a COVID-19 vaccination location, appointment-only rather than drop-in, for people registered with a GP linked to the groups of practices using the site.

Fiona Lemmens, chair of NHS Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group, says: "We're delighted to have the support of Liverpool Football Club for our latest vaccination location.

"Sport plays such an important role in the life of the city, so it's really fitting that the club is helping us to protect our population and hopefully look forward to a point in the future when we can see some normality begin to return."

In the meantime Liverpool Football Club, its charity and community teams will continue creating life-changing opportunities for young people and families in this extraordinary hour of need.

THE LFC FAMILY

Established as an independent registered charity in 2010, LFC Foundation provides a platform for the greatest football family in the world to come together and help those in need.

Just like our football team, we want to be the best, helping Liverpool FC make an impact both on and off the pitch.

Our vision is to become the world's leading football foundation that improves the lives of young people and families, creating life-changing opportunities in Liverpool and beyond.

WIN THE LIVERPOOL MISHMASH POSTER

It took about 2,000 hours spread over several years to create, measures around 27 x 39 inches and was inspired by a combination of *Where's Wally* and an old photo of the Spion Kop.

The *Liverpool Mishmash* is the history of LFC depicted in one giant image and the man behind this incredible creation is illustrator Alex Bennett.

"I'm a child of the 1980s and I absolutely loved *Where's Wally* and football," he says. "I had the idea to create a 'Mishmash' poster and a schoolfriend's dad was a massive Liverpool fan and had an old black-and-white photo of the Kop in his shed.

"I was always in awe of it so I started the Liverpool mishmash in 2016."

After initially adding to the canvas the Shankly Gates, Bruce Grobbelaar's 'spaghetti legs' and Steven Gerrard kissing the camera after scoring at Old Trafford, on social-media Alex asked for more suggestions. He was inundated with requests and the finished version now includes over 300 banners and countless goals, moments, incidents and memories that you could spend forever looking at.

"I illustrate everything using the medieval tools of pencil, paper and ink. When I'm happy with the outlines, I take them into Photoshop where I add colour, shading and things like badges and shirt numbers.

"Once I'm happy with the accuracy, I take the individual drawing into the main Mishmash canvas and work out where to place them.

"The trickiest part is the layering. Certain incidents dictate where other moments can go. For example, Gary McAllister's free-kick against Everton had to be placed where he scored from and the trajectory of the ball had to be right. It's like doing a jigsaw in reverse."

Alex's magnificent, truly unique creation is available to order as a glossy poster for £25 from thisisanfield.com/mishmash and our friends at *This Is Anfield* have given us five copies of the Liverpool Mishmash to be won in our exclusive competition.



To be in with a chance of winning, simply tell us:



What score did Liverpool beat Manchester United at Old Trafford in 2009 on the day that Steven Gerrard first kissed the camera to celebrate scoring?

Email your answer, name, address and contact phone-number with 'MISHMASH COMPETITION' in the subject line to liverpoolfcmag@reachsport.com before 1 April 2021.

Normal Reach PLC competition rules apply. Winners will receive their prizes from thisisanfield.com in due course.


L.F.C.
23
AXA
23



SHAQ says



Midfield ace Xherdan on favourite games and goals, the Liverpool FC work-ethic, and the return of the Red hordes one day



NEW ARRIVALS

"It's always good when you have new players coming in. Two new players, two defenders.

"Ozan from Germany who maybe I knew a bit more about as I watch quite a bit of the Bundesliga. Ben is from the Championship and I had also heard very, very good things about him, so I am really looking forward to being with them and working together and I am pretty sure they are going to help us.

"I'm also looking forward to when they have to sing in front of us – this is also very important and we are going to enjoy that!"

THIAGO'S TALENT

"Everybody knows what Thiago is capable of. I knew Thiago from my time at Bayern, a long time ago now, and we had a really good relationship. I think you can see that on the pitch, that we can understand each other very well.

"He's a special player and in his position he can kill a team with one pass – take out four or five players. So Thiago is a very important player for us and I know he can help us a lot, not only now but also in the future. He will be an unbelievably great player for this club."



"I HAVE KNOWN JÜRGEN A LONG TIME – IN GERMANY WE FACED EACH OTHER MANY TIMES AND HE WAS ALWAYS REALLY PASSIONATE – AND NOW I'M VERY HAPPY TO PLAY FOR HIM AND WORK WITH HIM TO TRY TO WIN MORE TROPHIES"

ON THE BOSS

"I have known Jürgen a long time, also from Germany when he was at Dortmund and I played for Bayern. We played many times against each other. He was also then really, really passionate and very intense on the sidelines.

"I'm very happy to play under him and I'm glad to work with him and hope that we can enjoy the time together. As a player you always want to develop and you know you can improve and I think since I came from Stoke, I have improved a lot of things.

"We have won a lot of things in the last few years so I am very, very happy here to play under the manager and I hope we can lift many, many more trophies."

EMPTY ANFIELD

"It's just sad to play without supporters because our fans push us in so many games. In the Barcelona game in the Champions League a couple of years ago, for example, when we came back from 3-0 down to win 4-0, it was unbelievable how they pushed us. They give us more of a percentage-chance to win a game.

"In another way, it is the same for everybody right now and we have played like this [behind-closed-doors] for a while. For the whole world it is the same for all teams.

"My hope is just that the fans can come back as soon as possible and life goes back to normal again."



AXA TRAINING CENTRE

"The new training ground at Kirkby is amazing. Obviously Melwood was unbelievable too and we'll never forget it – that will stay forever in our hearts. But life is like this and things change and it was time for a new training ground.

"To be honest, they have done an amazing job and we have the best facilities to improve ourselves – both for the young players and for us in the first-team – and so we really enjoy working there every day."

ALL ABOUT THE TEAM

"We have a very, very good squad with a lot of talented players around but we are a big team, a top team and we need these kind of players. To compete with the other top teams we need each other and everybody.

"I am trying to bring what I can and give my experience to help the team to win games. It is all about the team whether you play or if you don't play.

"If you get the chance you want to help the team to win games which is the most important thing and try to give something back to the coach and the fans with a good performance. That's our goal."

ALWAYS LEARNING

"I think we can always learn from each other and that applies for the younger players too. Trent is still a young player, a few years younger than me, and I can help him with things like free-kicks while he can help me with defensive things, so we can learn from each other in so many ways.

"We are growing every day in training together and we can always improve as a team."

ADVICE FOR YOUNGSTERS

"The young players coming through nowadays are very talented. It's not like ten years ago when it was a bit different, I would say. This generation are growing and growing and they know a lot of things already, maybe more than we knew at that stage of our careers. I would just tell them to stay calm.

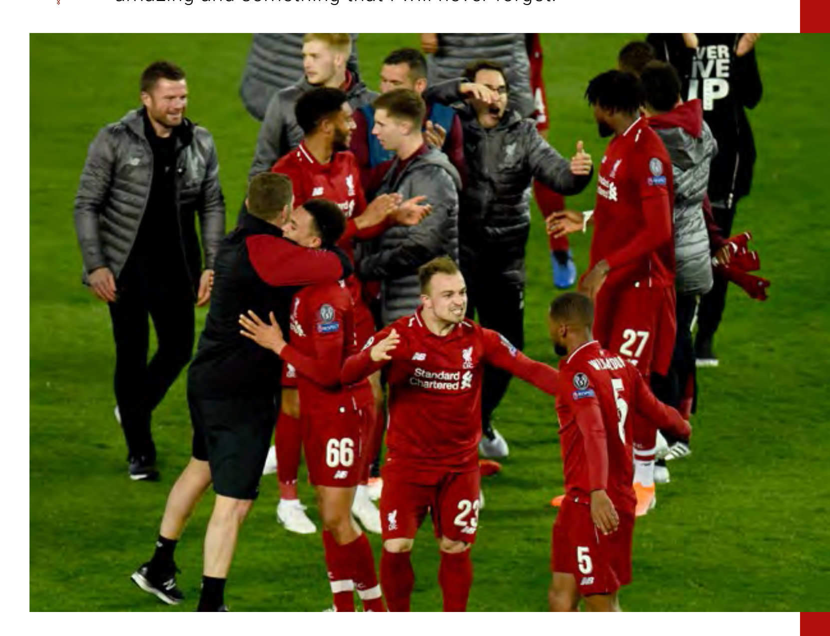
"For young players it is important to stay with their families because there will be a lot of rewards coming if they are successful and so they need to deal with those things. My advice would be to stay close to your family and keep working hard. Those things are very important and success is going to come if you are patient."

BARCA OR UNITED?

"It is difficult to say which is my favourite game for Liverpool as there have been so many and my Liverpool journey has been so amazing so far.

"I want to mention the Barcelona game in the Champions League semi-final because nobody thought we were going to come back, but as a team we believed in ourselves which is so important. Our fans believed, too, and of course we went on to win the Champions League. It was such an amazing feeling after that game, one I never will forget.

"The game against United at Anfield when I scored twice was also a nice one for me but even my first game for Liverpool was special when I scored the overhead kick against United in a friendly in front of 100,000 people in America. That was also amazing and something that I will never forget."



“WE WANT TO PLAY QUICK AND WE HAVE PLAYERS WHO CAN DECIDE A GAME WITH ONE PASS OR SHOT”



THE LIVERPOOL WAY

“The coach knows exactly how we can beat the opposing teams so we try to put that on the pitch and most of the time it has gone well.

“We have a few players who can play between the lines, not only me. Our game is like this. We want to play quick with intensity, with good ball-possession but also direct when necessary, so I think we have a very good mix.

“We have a lot of players who can decide a game with one pass or with one shot.”

HAMMERS ASSIST

“The second goal at West Ham [in January] was really important because it helped us to win the game. A lot of people were saying, ‘This is one of the best things I’ve seen from Liverpool’ but for us it was not new because we have scored from these kind of counter-attacks many times.

“Obviously it was all one-touch which was really nice to see and for a football fan it is great to watch goals like that. It was also really special for me with the one touch but Mo obviously finished it really well.

“It was a really nice assist but really good teamwork and, as I say, the most important thing was that it helped us to win the game.”

PREMIER LEAGUE HIGHLIGHTS

“It is difficult to pick out my favourite moment since moving into the Premier League almost six years ago.

“When I first came to England it was really special for me because it changed my life quite a bit. I had been used to living in big cities like Munich and Milan and so when I came to live in Cheshire it was a bit different. The culture was different and I didn’t speak English so well at the beginning.

“When I see how I am now, I feel homegrown here! Whenever I go to Switzerland and come back, this feels like home.

“Football-wise I had ups and downs with Stoke. The team had the relegation which was really disappointing. Personally I had some nice goals and some nice moments but when I came to Liverpool it was something really big for me and I was really happy to join this beautiful club. Since then we’ve had a really, really nice journey.

“We have won a lot of things and I hope there are many more coming. The English journey has been unbelievable so far.”

BASIC INSTINCT

“I have had a reputation for scoring spectacular goals, but I think most of the things just come from talent and I thank God that he gave me this left foot.

“Sometimes you do things that you don’t expect yourself, such as my goal for Switzerland [against Poland at Euro 2016] when I scored the overhead kick from edge of the 18-yard box. I never thought that I was going to do that, but at that moment when the ball came, I did it.

“It was the same for the first goal for Liverpool, the overhead kick against Manchester United in Michigan. For sure, sometimes you can train things like free-kicks, but most of the things are instinct and something that you want to bring to the team.

“This helps make me as a player too – someone who can do things in one second that maybe not everybody can do and that can also be decisive and decide a game with one pass or with one shot.

“The other day I was in the physio room and they were showing goals from the 2014/15 season and there were two or three goals there from me which was nice to see!”









“THE EXPERIENCE THAT WE HAD WITH THE FANS IN LIVERPOOL AFTER WINNING THE CHAMPIONS LEAGUE IN 2019 WAS SO UNBELIEVABLE THAT I’LL NEVER FORGET IT IN MY LIFE AND I WOULD LIKE TO CELEBRATE SOMETHING LIKE THAT AGAIN WITH THEM”

DOING IT FOR THE FANS

“It was my whole dream to lift the Premier League trophy. In Germany I also won trophies so for me it was just really unbelievable to be with this team and on this journey.

“It was just a shame that we couldn’t celebrate with the fans. The experience that we had with the fans in Liverpool after winning the Champions League in 2019 was so unbelievable that I’ll never forget it in my life and I would like to celebrate something like that again with the fans.”

SWISS ROLE

“With the Swiss national side we now have a very, very good team with a good mix of experienced players and young players who can still improve. We also have a very bright future and we want to try to improve ourselves in every tournament.

“We are hungry and the goals are bigger now than before, to try to go further in the big tournaments. I am very glad with how it is going with Swiss football at the moment with many players now playing in good leagues for top teams.”

WORK WORK WORK

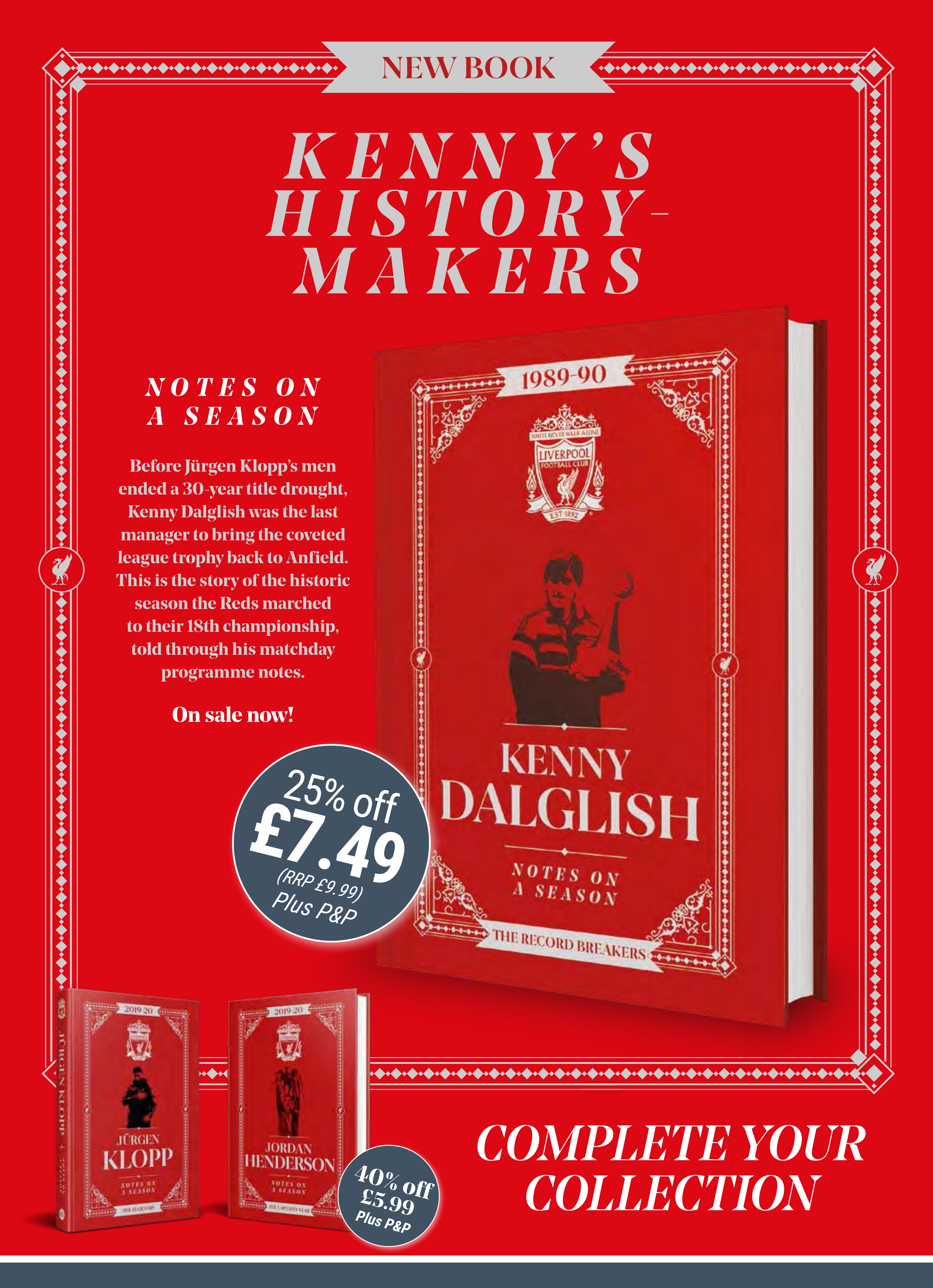
“Every year it is a challenge to play for big things in the Premier League because every team is very good and they all improve themselves every season. So it’s hard.

“It’s the best league in the world and so it’s always difficult going into every game.

“Of course everybody wants to win the league, but in the end only one team can but our goal is always to play for trophies.

“We know our qualities and we know how good our team is. We have tried every year to do the biggest things we can and so we have to get ourselves back in a good way again.

“We have many games coming up that are very important so we need to stay on track, keep working hard and then we will see in the end what will happen.”


NEW BOOK
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NO EXIT



A MILLION MILES

That's how far the Kop would forever walk for one of Kenny Dalglish's goals, and this is his LFC life


umbro

AND COULD HE PLAY

Kenny's association with Liverpool began in the late Seventies when he took possession of the no7 shirt and heralded another glorious era for the Reds

When Bob Paisley identified Celtic ace Kenny Dalglish as the man he wanted to replace Hamburg-bound Kevin Keegan as Liverpool's first-choice forward in 1977, he could not have begun to imagine the impact the Scot would have at Anfield.

Looking back at his LFC career over four decades since he walked through the door as a 26-year-old forward, it is impossible to play down Kenny's contribution.

Humble to the core, the burden of being Britain's most expensive footballer at the time seemed to weigh lightly on Dalglish's shoulders.

Keegan had been a hero to a generation of Kopites so there was always going to be huge pressure on whoever filled his boots. Paisley was determined that man would be Dalglish.

Liverpool had made Celtic three offers which were all rejected. A bid of £400,000 was also knocked back but when Bhoys boss Jock Stein let slip that another ten per cent could see an agreement reached, Reds chairman John Smith sanctioned a deal for a British record-fee of £440,000.

Given how his debut season would unfold, it seemed fitting that Kenny should make his Liverpool debut at Wembley. He first pulled on the no7 jersey at 'Anfield South' for a goalless draw with Manchester United in the season curtain-raiser, the FA Charity Shield, going close with an overhead kick.

It had been a whirlwind week. "An awful lot happened very quickly," he recalled. "I played for Celtic on the Tuesday, spoke to Liverpool after the game at midnight, drove down to Anfield with John Smith and Bob Paisley. Had a medical. Signed. Came in for training Thursday morning. Travelled Friday. Played Saturday.

"But I felt comfortable the very first time I walked into the place. That was the thing that struck me in training: they'd just come straight off two trophies the year before – European Cup, the League – and got to the FA Cup final. And they just said, 'You get nothing for last year'. The attitude was magnificent."

Kenny got off to a flyer, scoring on his league debut at





Middlesbrough. Three days later he made his home bow against another North East side as Liverpool defeated Newcastle United 2-0 with Dalglish breaking the deadlock a minute into the second half. The vast, all-standing Spion Kop was smitten by the style and the smile.

"There was a boy playing for them called Tommy Craig," he recalled. "We had grown up together at schoolboy level, Glasgow Schools and Scottish schoolboys.

"We were coming out on the pitch about five minutes before the game. I said to wee Tommy: 'That sign up there is supposed to make you nervous'. He said: 'If it's making you nervous, you should see what it's doing to me'.

"It was the first time I had ever touched the This Is Anfield sign. In the second half Ray Kennedy played a ball through to me and I ran on towards the Kop and put it in the back of the net. I was up-and-running and what a fantastic feeling that was."

Kenny continued finding the back of the net on a regular basis and that first season at Anfield would be his best in terms of a goalscoring return. Kopites had a new hero and Dalglish repaid their support with 31 goals in all competitions.

He was strong, skilful and so, so canny in possession – shielding the ball from aggressors, turning on a sixpence, finishing with class, playing in team-mates to score – and manager Paisley was delighted.

"I just hoped that after the trials and tribulations of my early years in management, someone up high would smile on me and guide my hand," he said in later years.

"My plea was answered when we got Kenny Dalglish. What a player, what a great professional."

Kenny admitted that a big pull towards joining Liverpool had been the chance to play in the European Cup after seeing the Reds win the coveted trophy for the first time the previous season.

When he scored in the 3-0 win over old foes Borussia Moenchengladbach in the second leg of the 1977/78 semi-final at Anfield, it earned Liverpool another trip to Wembley (where the final was being staged) and the chance to retain their title as kings of Europe.

Twenty minutes into the final's second half, fellow Scot Graeme Souness played a cute pass in behind the Bruges defence and Kenny dinked the ball over advancing keeper Birger Jensen before hurdling the advertising hoardings to celebrate the goal that proved to be the difference.



MY PLEA WAS ANSWERED WHEN WE SIGNED KENNY DALGLISH – WHAT A PLAYER, WHAT A GREAT PROFESSIONAL





"To win the European Cup in my first year was something I was very fortunate to have achieved," he said. "To score was a dream-come-true. We just wanted that trophy and having tasted it once, you wanted it again."

He'd have to wait three years before that came to fruition, but the next two seasons saw Kenny help the Reds to back-to-back league titles. Liverpool had finished as runners-up to Nottingham Forest in his debut campaign but finished eight points clear of



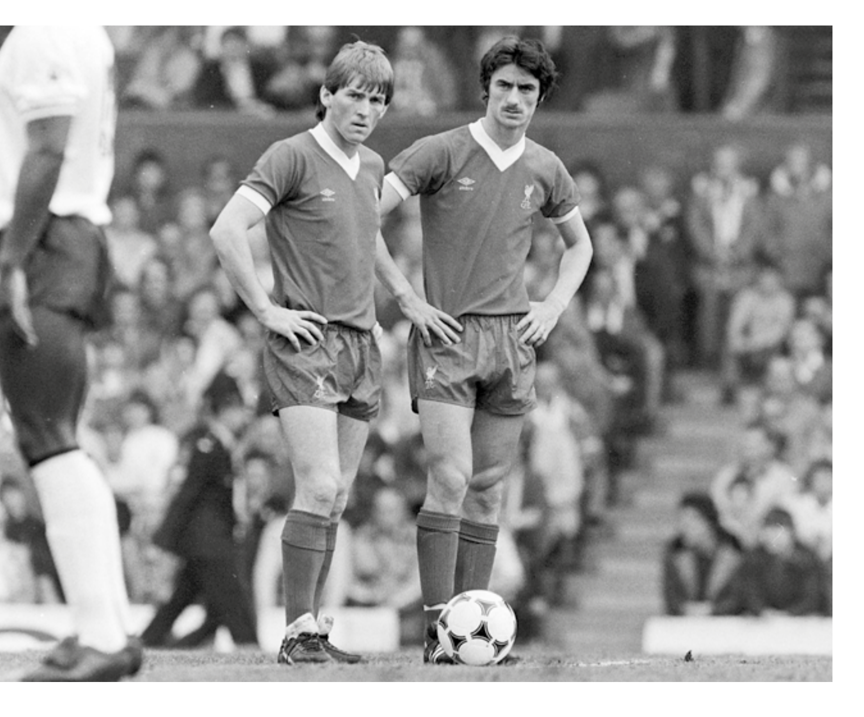




Dalglish was strong and skilful and so canny in possession – shielding the ball from aggressors, turning on a sixpence, finishing with class, playing in team-mates to score – and idolised by the Spion Kop







Brian Clough's side the following year, 1978/79, when he also scored an unforgettable individual goal against Manchester United in an FA Cup semi-final at Maine Road.

Kenny again finished as the club's leading scorer with 21 league goals and 25 overall. His efforts were recognised by the Football Writers' Association who named him as their player of the year.

In 1979/80 he was an ever-present as Liverpool successfully defended their title. In 1980/81 there was more joy in the cups. The League Cup had so far eluded Liverpool but this time the Scot helped to end that wait.

His volleyed equaliser against West Ham in the final replay at Villa Park put Liverpool on their way to a 2-1 win. It would be the first of four consecutive triumphs in the tournament with Tottenham Hotspur, Manchester United and Everton beaten in 1982, 1983 and 1984 respectively.

In 1981 he tasted European Cup glory for a second time. Kenny scored at Anfield in a 4-0 second-round, second-leg trouncing of Alex Ferguson's Aberdeen which helped set the run off and he was an integral to the team that lifted the famous trophy again as the Reds edged out Real Madrid in Paris.

By 1981/82 his link-up with spring-heeled young Welsh marksman Ian Rush was taking the football world by storm.









The duo shared 30 league goals and 52 in all competitions as Liverpool regained their top-flight title.

The following campaign was arguably Kenny's best in a Liverpool shirt. He and Rush again shared more than 50 goals, with the Scot netting 20 of them, as the Reds retained the league championship and claimed a hat-trick of League Cup successes to give retiring manager Paisley the perfect send-off in 1983.

Kenny was voted player of the year by his peers in the Professional Footballers Association as well as the press.

"It recognises what your team has achieved rather than what you have achieved as an individual," he reflected. "You can never win anything without the rest of your team."

The success of his side was further highlighted as he finished runner-up to French schemer Michel Platini in the Ballon d'Or vote. He also claimed the BBC's goal-of-the-season award, albeit for an effort in Scotland colours rather than Liverpool's – a beguiling solo strike against Belgium.

The 1983/84 season saw Liverpool under a new manager, Boot Room veteran Joe Fagan, whose first campaign in charge was



TO GET AN AWARD LIKE THAT FROM THE QUEEN IS GREAT FOR YOUR FAMILY – I WAS A FOOTBALLER WHO WAS LIVING THE DREAM OF A WEE BOY



marked by a treble of league, League Cup and, for the third time in Kenny's Liverpool career, the European Cup.

At the start of the run which saw the Reds conquer Europe again by beating Roma on penalties in their own stadium, the Scot had set a new European record: surpassing Denis Law's mark for most goals by a British player in Europe's premier competition. He netted his 15th in the first-round against Odense.

The 1984/85 season, during which he turned 34 years of age, was to be his last as a member of the 'rank-and-file' in the Anfield dressing-room, and sadly it coincided with the terrible tragedy at Heysel before the European Cup final against Juventus.

Earlier that year, Kenny's remarkable contribution was further recognised when he was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours list for his services to football.

"To get an award like that from the Queen is great for your family," he said. "I was a footballer who was living the dream of a wee boy."



RETURN OF THE KING

A silver-lined transition to management, the shadow of tragedy, success on foreign fields and the irresistible call of Anfield

The year before Kenny Dalglish was first appointed as manager of Liverpool Football Club, he was offered a new contract.

"The club offered me four years at 33 years of age," he recalled. "I asked [LFC secretary] Peter Robinson why. 'I just think you deserve it', replied Robinson. 'I know what age you are, but we are delighted to offer you the contract'."

Kenny didn't realise it at the time, but forward-thinking Liverpool were already looking to the future – they saw managerial potential in Dalglish.

When Joe Fagan stepped down 12 months later in 1985 – making the decision before the tragedy of Heysel – Kenny was summoned to a meeting at chairman John Smith's home. He was offered the job of player-manager.

In the book Kenny Dalglish: My Life he reflected. "It was a great honour. At the meeting I said to them, 'I'll try it, but if I'm no good I'll just go back to playing'. We started from there." Although he missed being just one of the players, he revealed they were "brilliant and really supportive."

Bob Paisley was brought out of retirement to help Kenny in a 'father-figure' role with youth-development officer Tom Saunders also part of the backroom team, while Ronnie Moran and Roy Evans continued to lead training sessions.

Dalglish being the club's first ever player-manager created a new dynamic for everyone to get used to, not least himself: "I was reluctant to pick myself at the beginning. I hadn't played too many times and it was more difficult to name myself as substitute because you get so caught-up with the games when you're the manager. It takes so much out of you that you might as well be playing."

In that first season, 1985/86, the Reds went head-to-head with champions Everton in both the league and FA Cup. After winning at Anfield in February, the Blues went eight points clear of the Reds with 12 games to play. But a 90th-minute Ian Rush winner in Liverpool's next game at Spurs set Dalglish's men off on a run of ten victories and one draw in their next eleven.

When Everton suffered a shock 1-0 reverse at Oxford United on the same night that Liverpool won 2-0 at Leicester City, it meant that if the Reds won their final league game of the season at Chelsea they would be champions.

Incredibly the only goal of the game was scored by Dalglish when he chested down Jim Beglin's flick-on and volleyed into the





net. It remains the only time a manager has scored the goal that wins his team an English league title. A week later Kenny was part of the side which Liverpool completed the first league and FA Cup double in the club's history with a 3-1 win over Everton at Wembley. What a first campaign in charge.

Season 1986/87 wasn't as successful, with the Reds losing for the first time ever in a game in which Rush scored – the League Cup final against Arsenal. The Welshman, then aged 25, would leave for Juventus at the end of a campaign which Liverpool finished as runners-up to Everton.

Dalglish needed to rebuild and did so in style. In came goal-poacher John Aldridge and busy midfielder Ray Houghton from Oxford, wonder winger John Barnes from Watford and brilliant forward Peter Beardsley from Newcastle for a club-record fee.

With a new four-pronged attack, Liverpool were a team transformed. Some of the football they played in season 1987/88 was the best ever seen at Anfield, where they won 15 and drew five of their 20 home league games.

A 5-0 demolition of Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest saw Dalglish's men labelled as "better than the Brazilians" by guest-of-honour that evening, the legendary Sir Tom Finney.

Liverpool swaggered to the title with four games to spare, but Dalglish was denied a 'double double' by Wimbledon's shock 1-0 victory in the FA Cup final.

Rush made a surprise return from Juventus in the summer of 1988 and by the following April the Reds were on course to retain the title and reach the FA Cup final again. Then came the Hillsborough disaster.

On 15 April 1989 in Sheffield, 95 Liverpool supporters were unlawfully killed on the Leppings Lane terrace before the FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest. A 96th victim, Tony Bland, died from his injuries in 1992.

The tragedy devastated the city of Liverpool. Huge queues formed at Anfield when the stadium gates were opened to allow people to pay their respects.

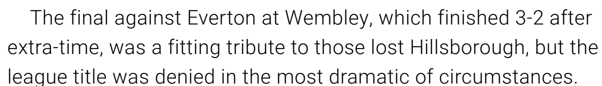
"One morning before everybody was in, I went out onto the pitch and tied my children's teddy bears around a goalpost at the Kop end," wrote Kenny in his 1996 autobiography. "The goals, the pitch and the whole Kop were covered in flowers, scarves and tributes. It was the saddest and most beautiful sight I had ever seen."

Kenny, at the age of 38, led Liverpool FC through the aftermath of Hillsborough. He and wife Marina attended as many funerals as they could, as did the players.

A fortnight and a day after the disaster, Liverpool returned to the pitch to play a friendly at Celtic. Appropriately it was Dalglish who opened the scoring. The Reds subsequently returned to action and won the replayed semi-final against Forest at Old Trafford.









The final against Everton at Wembley, which finished 3-2 after extra-time, was a fitting tribute to those lost Hillsborough, but the league title was denied in the most dramatic of circumstances.

As fate would have it, title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal met on the final night of the season at Anfield. The Reds just needed to avoid defeat by two goals or more to be champions, but Gunners forward Alan Smith opened the scoring, and with almost the last kick of the season Michael Thomas made it two.

Dalglish looked haunted in the home dugout as his players collapsed to the turf. It was perhaps the toughest defeat to take in Liverpool's entire history.

The team bounced back in 1989/90 by winning an 18th title, but the impact of Hillsborough was taking a toll on Kenny, who officially retired from playing in 1990.

Stress was affecting his health and in February 1991, following an FA Cup replay against Everton at Goodison Park which finished 4-4, he shocked the football world by resigning as Liverpool manager.





He'd already made the decision before that epic game. Quite simply, he needed time away from football.

"A clean break was my only way of reclaiming my equilibrium and recharging my batteries. Resigning was a decision made primarily in my best interests, but I was also thinking of Liverpool's interests. A manager who cannot make decisions has to go."

Eight months later, a refreshed Dalglish returned as manager of ambitious Blackburn Rovers, then in the second tier but backed by wealthy owner Jack Walker. They were promoted via the play-offs and began their first season back in football's big time since 1966 by signing prolific striker Alan Shearer from Southampton for a British-record transfer fee.

On Kenny's first Anfield return his Rovers lost 2-1 to a Reds side now managed by his old team-mate Graeme Souness. They finished fourth in that inaugural 1992/93 Premier League season, then as runners-up in 1993/94.

The following season, with Chris Sutton now partnering Shearer upfront, Blackburn visited Anfield on the final day of the season knowing a win would make them champions.

They lost 2-1 with Jamie Redknapp – Dalglish's last signing as Liverpool boss – scoring the winner for the Reds.

But Manchester United's failure to win at West Ham on the same day meant that Kenny had led Blackburn to the Premier League title...at Anfield.

He became the Lancashire club's director of football that summer – with Ray Harford stepping up as manager – and left the club in 1996 before replacing Kevin Keegan as Newcastle United boss in January 1997.

After an unsuccessful 20-month spell with the Magpies, he was sacked for the first time in his career but appointed as director of footballing operations at Celtic in the summer of 1999.

He boldly hired John Barnes as manager, but things didn't work out and Kenny himself had to take charge in February 2000, leading the Celtic to a League Cup success before standing down that summer in favour of Martin O'Neill.

In July 2009 he returned to Liverpool FC in a senior role at the Academy while also becoming the club's new ambassador.

"I am really pleased to have Kenny as a part of the staff," said manager Rafael Benitez. "We were looking for someone who has a knowledge and a passion for the club and Kenny is the perfect choice.

"If you're looking for somebody to go around the world on behalf of the club then I don't know anybody better than Kenny."

A year on and Rafa was replaced with Roy Hodgson by the club's previous owners. Three months after winning a court battle to buy LFC, new custodians Fenway Sports Group relieved Hodgson of his duties following a 3-1 defeat at Blackburn's Ewood Park that left the Reds four points above the relegation zone with over half of the season already completed. They called in Kenny.

"In 2011 I got the call I thought would never come that would take me back to Anfield as Liverpool manager. When I was asked to return, it was a no-brainer.

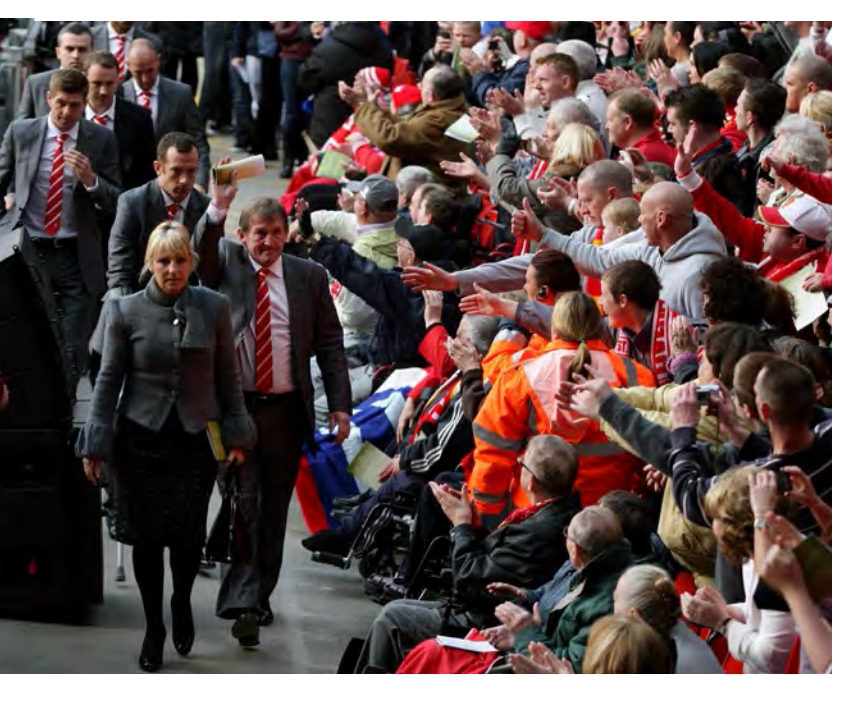
"I had left Liverpool in the middle of the season [1990/91] so I went back to finish another one off! Just to be back among the











people at Anfield meant a huge amount to me and my family."

Immediately losing star striker Fernando Torres to Chelsea was a blow, but in came Luis Suarez and Andy Carroll. The Reds recovered their form – Dirk Kuyt scoring a hat-trick against Manchester United and Maxi Rodriguez netting trebles against Birmingham City and Fulham – to finish sixth in the final standings.

Jordan Henderson, Jose Enrique, Stewart Downing and Charlie Adam were among Dalglish's summer signings and while Premier League form was only good enough to finish eighth, Liverpool reached both the Carling Cup and FA Cup finals.

Following a 2-2 draw in the former against Cardiff City, the Reds won 3-2 on penalties to lift a first piece of silverware since 2006. "That League Cup was a trophy for Liverpool Football Club," reflected Dalglish. "I don't see that as anything but a positive."

Coming from behind to beat Everton 2-1 in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley with goals from Suarez and Carroll was another highlight, but Liverpool were narrowly beaten 2-1 in the final by Chelsea.

A week later, King Kenny's second spell as manager came to an end with Brendan Rodgers brought in to succeed him, but it was far from the end of his Liverpool story.

KNIGHT OF THE REALM



In the last decade Kenny has continued to be honoured by Liverpool FC and indeed the country, and no one was more thrilled when the Reds finally landed the Premier League title last summer


Foundation
L.F.C.

Following his second spell as manager, Kenny returned to Liverpool FC as a non-executive director in October 2013 and was an avid supporter of the side under Brendan Rodgers which came so close to winning the Premier League.

On the day-of-change in October 2015 when Jürgen Klopp was appointed manager, Kenny called it just right: "I think the supporters will need to fasten their seatbelts and I'm sure they'll take him to their hearts."

Two years later the Reds were back in the Champions League and Anfield's Centenary Stand – opposite the new expanded Main Stand – was renamed in recognition of Dalglish's unique contribution to the club. Stars past and present were out in force for the official ceremony, including former team-mates and old rivals like Sir Alex Ferguson, with whom Kenny shared memories and laughs.

The honour didn't change Dalglish. Six months earlier he'd even been on the Spion Kop to watch a Liverpool game against Bournemouth. After the stand-renaming, one of his first ports of call was St Andrews Community Network, a short distance from the stadium, where he dropped off a donation to the North Liverpool Foodbank.

Kenny joined staff volunteers from LFC to help prepare food-parcels for local residents in need, as the club encouraged fans to donate what they could on matchdays for people in crisis in the L4, L5 and L6 areas of the city.

Dalglish had also been clear that the stand with his name had to be inclusive, and to this end he came up with the idea of The Kenny Dalglish Community Suite, housed within and to be used by the club's community team Red Neighbours with a focus on supporting the elderly, addressing food-poverty, encouraging physical activity and creating memorable experiences for young people.

A spokesperson for FSG remarked: "Having provided so much joy on the pitch, it speaks volumes for Kenny that even though his playing days are now behind him his desire to make a positive difference on behalf of the people of Liverpool remains as strong as ever."

November 2017 brought the release of a movie entitled *Kenny*, chronicling both the triumphs and the tragedies with unprecedented access to the Dalglish family (and that appearance as a fan on the Kop the previous April). It had its world premiere at Liverpool's city-centre FACT cinema.

The most poignant part was undoubtedly his recollections of Hillsborough. Rather than return to the scene, Kenny parked up on a









hillside overlooking the stadium in Sheffield and reflected: "I don't want to go back, I don't want those memories to come back to the forefront of my mind.

"People might say you are running away from it. If I am, I am. But at the end of the day it still won't get me back."

Nevertheless Kenny and his wife Marina were a pillar of support for the families of the 96 in the aftermath of the tragedy and have stood alongside them ever since.





In September 2016 he and the families received the Freedom of the City at Liverpool Town Hall, and last April 2020 on the 31st anniversary he said: "This is a day when, first and foremost, we remember those who went to a football match and never came home – they will never be forgotten. But we should also think of the families and survivors who showed the rest of us how to deal with an unimaginable tragedy.

"By sticking together, supporting one another and standing up for what was right, they set an example which will always resonate, none more so than during the current time when so many families are dealing with tragedies of their own."

In May 2018, as part of the club's 125th anniversary celebrations, pupils at New Park Primary School in Anfield got a treat when the Reds legend dropped by with signed copies of his new book!

Entitled *King Kenny*, it was created by LFC's main sponsor Standard Chartered to help support Red Neighbours projects. In rhyming





couplets the book told the Dalglish story and was even available to download in Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Korean.

Six months later, King Kenny was knighted by Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace for services to football, charity and the city of Liverpool – and immediately dedicated it to three managerial legends.

"Obviously it was for others with more education and knowledge than myself to decide whether or not I deserved a knighthood and it goes without saying that I am hugely grateful to them for the decision that they have made," he said.

"All I can say is that from my own point-of-view I am definitely no more deserving of an accolade like this than Jock Stein, Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley were.

"I am just fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time and I would like to dedicate this honour to them because without the standards that they set at Glasgow Celtic and Liverpool, individuals like myself would not have been able to thrive as much as we did."

He continued: "Nobody achieves anything alone, especially in football, and in my case any success I have enjoyed has been due to the contributions made by my family, the players, coaches and managers that I was fortunate enough to work with, and the supporters who backed me."

Kenny's knighthood was also recognition for his contribution in support of not only the Hillsborough families and the Marina Dalglish Appeal.

In 2004 he and his wife had founded the charity to raise money to help treat cancer, and in 2016 a £2m donation to Liverpool's Walton Centre allowed the purchase of a new state-of-the-art MRI scanner.

In total Kenny has helped to raise over £10 million to improve cancer-care across Merseyside – one of the achievements recognised by FSG when he was knighted: "Kenny Dalglish is a man whose influence and impact have transcended his own prodigious individual talent," stated the clubs owners, before adding that his charity work "in many ways will be a legacy that transcends any title."

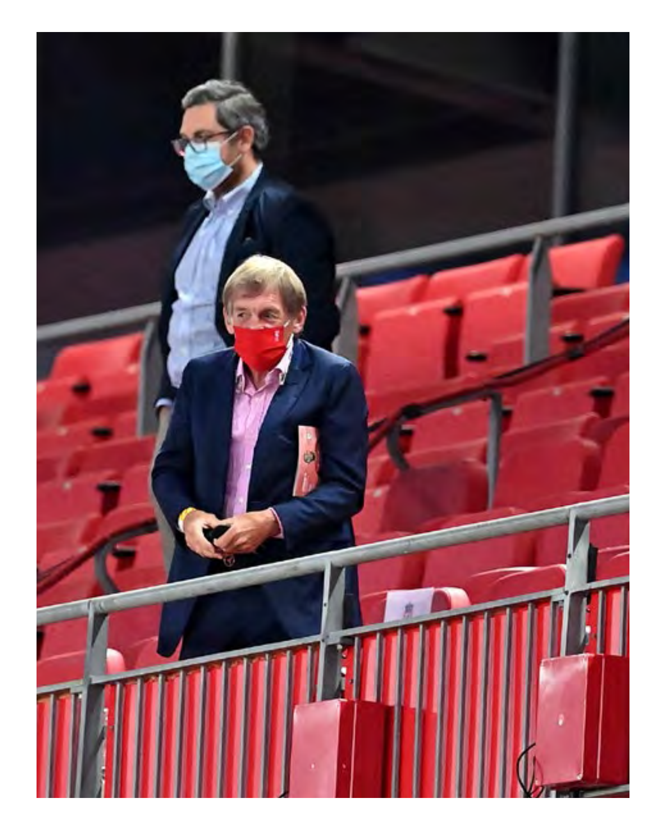
Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, reflected: "The global culture of football has many negative features. His honour sends out a signal that the world of football and society at large value his humanitarian and compassionate leadership which are an antidote to the values of fame and fortune so often associated with football today.

"He is truly an exceptional role-model."

Gary Lineker, once a rival in blue 'across the park' said he was "thrilled to see that Kenny Dalglish has been knighted – no-one in football is more deserving. A truly great footballer and a wonderfully empathetic human being. Arise, Sir King Kenny."

The stand signage at Anfield was recalibrated accordingly, but the Spion Kop was the spiritual setting in July 2020 when Dalglish presented Jordan Henderson with the Premier League trophy.

By then Kenny had already toasted the title-win live on BT Sport,



and Henderson subsequently wrote in his matchday programme notes: "One of the things that set me off on the night we won it was seeing Kenny on TV immediately after and how emotional he was. Along with Damien Comolli [LFC's former director of football strategy] Kenny is the reason I got the opportunity to play for this amazing club.

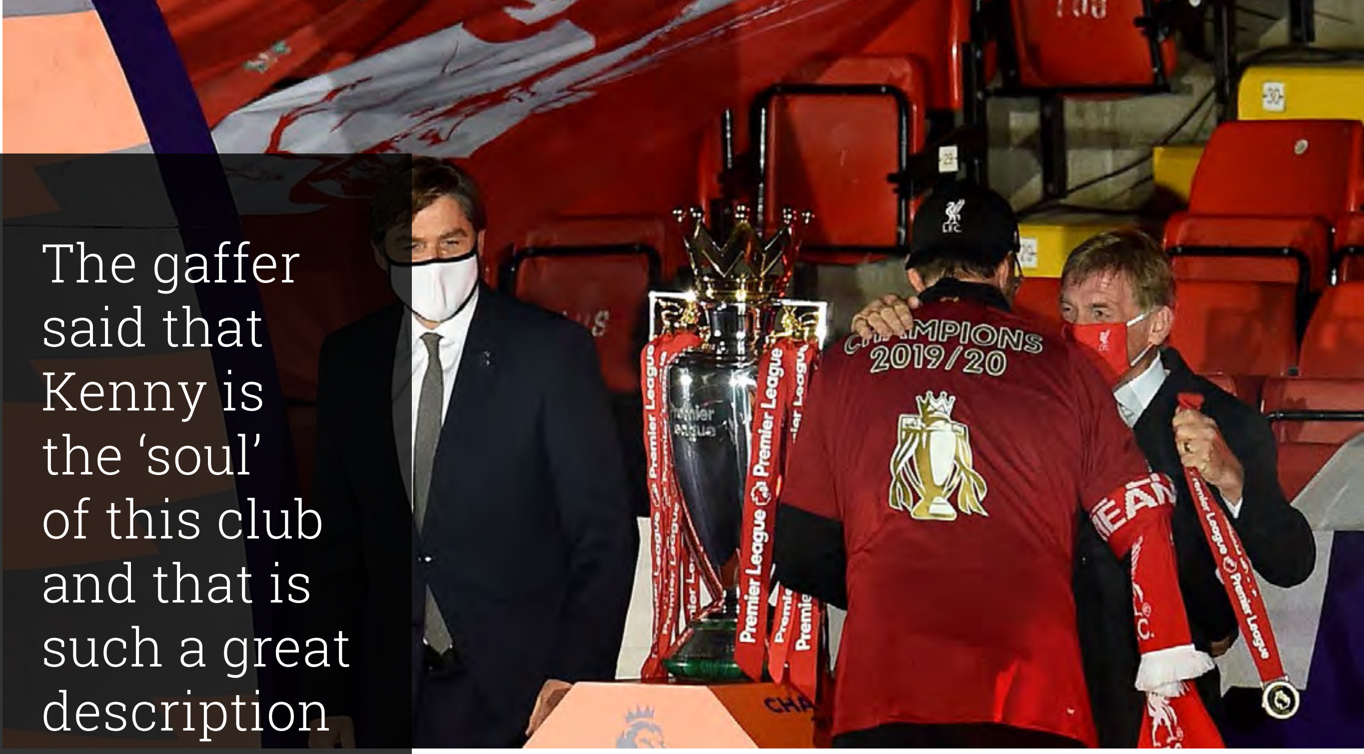
"I can still remember, clear as day, the first conversation we had and the first meeting we had. I still remember those first training sessions. Sir Kenny taught me how special this club is and that when you are privileged to represent it on the pitch, you carry a great responsibility.

"The gaffer [Jürgen Klopp] said that Kenny is our 'soul' and that is such a great description. To know he is in the stands supporting us – home and away – drives us on as a team. When he is on our plane coming back from away-games every player wants to shake his hand."

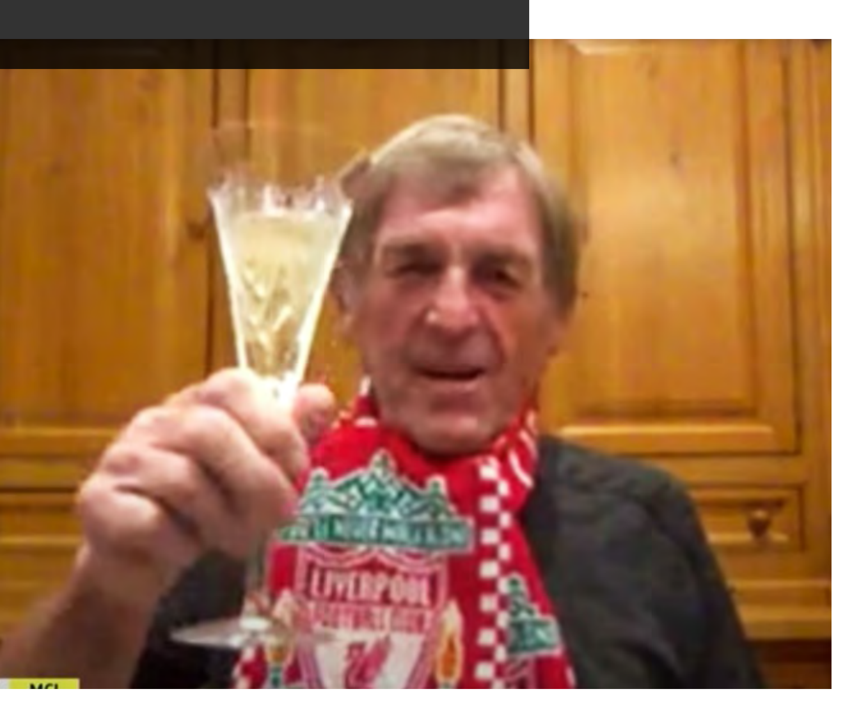
Typically, Kenny returned the compliment in an interview with the club website: "Jordan Henderson is a credit to himself.

"When he came here to Liverpool as a young boy, you could tell





The gaffer said that Kenny is the 'soul' of this club and that is such a great description



there and then. Apart from having the opportunity to be a fantastic footballer, he's also a really good person and he's turned out exactly the way you thought he would have turned out.

"He's epitomised everything that a Liverpool captain should be on and off the pitch."

There was a tribute too for the manager whose team had so thrillingly claimed a top-flight title last won when Dalglish himself was in charge in 1990.

"I think he's a Scouser in disguise really. I don't think he's really German – he's putting an act on there! Because he epitomises everything that the Liverpool people want, that the football club want and the city. "He's a perfect fit for the club. He's just everything that the club has stood for since Shanks."

Kenny summed up the Premier League triumph with these moving words: "I've got older now. You had your own kids when you were winning things and now you've got your grandkids and you know what it means to them.

"It's fantastic that generations pass on to their sons and daughters the stories of their success, Wembley trips, the European finals, the league championship successes.

"For me, that's hugely important to the culture at Liverpool FC because that's what the football club is all about."

WIN

THE NEW KENNY BOOK!

When Kenny Dalglish's star-studded Liverpool powered to their 18th top-flight title in 1989/90 nobody could have guessed that decades would pass before the Reds would become champions of England again. No wonder that fabulous side has a special status with Anfield fans.

Kenny Dalglish: Notes on a Season is an official club book which takes a fascinating look back at that 1989/90 campaign in the words of the LFC legend himself. His matchday programme notes give a personal insight into a season that saw the Reds finish nine points clear of the pack, with some remarkable highlights along the way.

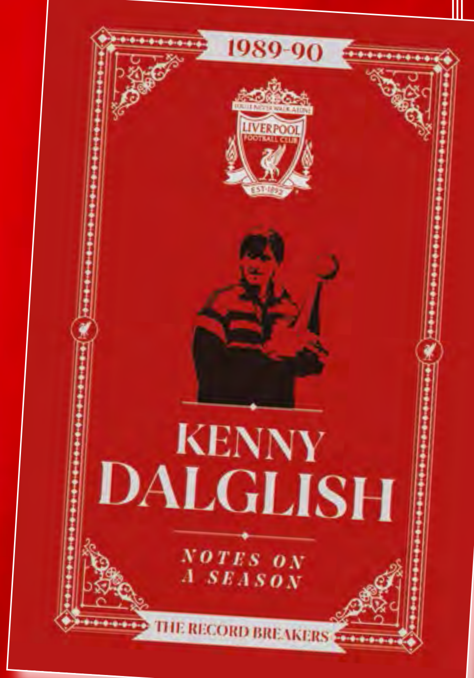
Swedish international Glenn Hysen was the only major signing heading into a season that started well and September saw them famously beat Crystal Palace 9-0 – still the club's record top-flight win.

Sizeable victories became a theme of a campaign that also saw 8-0, 6-1 and 5-2 scorelines. Kenny led the Reds to a derby double in the league and a memorable 2-1 win at Old Trafford as John Barnes top-scored.

With the finishing line within sight, Dalglish pulled off a masterstroke by signing a little-known Israeli striker called Ronny Rosenthal, who scored seven league goals in eight appearances to help see the Reds home.

Liverpool collected the championship trophy at Anfield in May with the manager making his final playing appearance.

Kenny Dalglish: Notes on a Season charts this momentous season through the eyes of the man who led the way.



We have three copies of this new hardback up for grabs.
To be in with a chance of winning one, simply tells us:

In total how many top-flight titles did Kenny Dalglish win with Liverpool as both a player and player-manager? (a) 6 (b) 7 (c) 8

Email your answer, name, address and contact phone-number with 'KENNY BOOK COMPETITION' in the subject line to liverpoolfcmag@reachsport.com before 1 April 2021. Normal Reach PLC competition rules apply. Winners will be notified and receive their prizes in due course. The winner of the signed Andy Robertson book in last month's competition is Julie Craythorne, Belfast.

RED... AMBER... GO

Liverpool FC Women's interim-manager Amber Whiteley is loving her current role as the Reds re-group with hard work on the training-ground and solid foundations built for next season and beyond

Interview: William Hughes

AMBER, YOU'VE BEEN IN THE ROLE A COUPLE OF MONTHS NOW – HOW HAVE YOU SETTLED INTO IT?

There have been some challenges, without doubt, but I can honestly say that I have enjoyed every minute of it so far. I'm just grateful to the board for the opportunity.

It's been a really good experience and one that I've learnt from. It's an absolute pleasure to work with our staffing group and our playing group. I feel like we're in a good place now and when the new first-team manager comes in, hopefully we'll be in a good place to hit the ground running.

FOR VARIOUS REASONS THE TEAM ONLY PLAYED THREE GAMES IN JAN/FEB WITH ANOTHER THREE-WEEK GAP COMING IN MARCH/APRIL – HAS THAT BEEN FRUSTRATING?

Yes, absolutely. It's been frustrating not having that consistent run of games but the other side of that is that it's given us the opportunity to put the work in, on and off the pitch, and we're in a much better place now for having had that time.

We've done a lot of work since Christmas in the final third and I think we've seen some positive results from that so far and hopefully that will continue to pay off in our forthcoming games.

It's a sign of the work that's gone in on the training ground and the free weekends when we've either been training or playing friendlies.

YOU'VE HAD A FEW PLAYERS RETURNING FROM INJURY AND STARTED MARCH WITH ALMOST A FULLY-FIT SQUAD…

Yes, that's been really good for us and a credit to the medical and sports science team. They've done a really good job and it's really encouraging that we've got nearly everybody back fit now and competition is high for places.

If you looked at our bench for the London Bees game [on 28 February] I had a bit of a selection headache leading into that weekend and that is exactly how it should be.


AW
L.F.C.
AXA



Teenager Lucy Parry in action

It's been competitive in training, everyone has been fighting for a shirt and it's really pleasing to see that those who did come into the game off the bench made an impact, which is exactly what we want.

YOU BROUGHT IN MIDFIELDER CERI HOLLAND IN JANUARY AND SHE'S MADE QUITE AN IMPRESSION WITH GOALS IN HER FIRST TWO GAMES…

Ceri has settled in really well and it feels like she's been part of the club for a lot longer than she has. She has a fantastic energy and work-ethic as well as great technical ability and she's been a welcome addition to the team for the second half of the season.

She came on against Charlton and made a great impact in that game, but I think if you had asked her if she could've chosen between scoring for us or coming away with all three points, she would've chosen the latter. Thankfully she was able to do both in our next game against London Bees.

Her energy is fantastic as we saw that day. She covered so much ground and was still going strong late on in the game. I thought she took her chance really well too. At 1-0 up when you're one-on-one with the keeper, the pressure is on but I thought she stayed calm and finished her opportunity very well.

> IT'S IMPORTANT TO GIVE YOUNGER PLAYERS A CHANCE AND IT'S PART OF OUR CLUB PHILOSOPHY

YOU'VE SHOWN YOU ARE KEEN TO GIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PLAYERS WITH TEENAGERS LUCY PARRY AND EMILY BROUGH FEATURING…

I think it's important to give younger players a chance and our younger players will continue to get opportunities here – it's part of our philosophy as a club. We bring our youth players through the system and we give them opportunities at senior level when they're ready.

Lucy Parry has been absolutely fantastic for us and she's got a bright future ahead of her. We've got a really good talent pool beneath the first team. As well as Lucy most recently we've had Eleanor Heeps, Emily Brough and Mia Ross as part of the first-team squad and they have all made fantastic contributions and no doubt we'll be seeing them again in and around the first-team squad in the future.

YOU GAVE EMILY A DEBUT AGAINST LONDON BEES LAST MONTH…

Emily is a special player and she has got a bright future ahead of her. There is lots of work to be done, of course, but it was brilliant to get her on the pitch and give her that debut. She is one to watch.



New signing Ceri Holland has made an instant impact

YOU PICKED UP YOUR FIRST WIN AS INTERIM MANAGER WITH THAT 3-0 DEFEAT OF LONDON BEES – THAT MUST HAVE BEEN A GOOD MOMENT…

It was good to get that first win. It was a challenge for us. London Bees are facing a totally different challenge to the one that we are facing in that they're fighting to stay in the league.

When you come up against teams who are in that position, you've got to expect them to raise their game and go up another level and they were hard to break down. We had to be resilient and be able to match and go beyond their efforts and I felt that we did. It was a good performance.

We started that game really well and scored a really good early goal with a brilliant cross from Ash Hodson and a good finish from Becky Jane. There was still work to be done in the second half, but I thought the three players who came into the game as substitutes made a really good impact and that shows the importance of the squad – you can't just rely on the eleven who start the game, you need a bigger squad to win you games and that's going to be key to us going forward.

Mel Lawley was excellent when she came on, she looked really bright, Rachel Furness got an assist and Amy Rodgers scored as well so that was very pleasing.

FOUR OF YOUR REMAINING FIVE MATCHES WILL BE PLAYED AT HOME – HOW IMPORTANT IS THAT?

It's absolutely an advantage to be at home. We play on a really good surface over at Prenton Park and we are able to play the way that we want to there.

Of course we miss the fans so much and we can't wait to welcome our supporters back to Prenton. Playing behind-closed-doors is definitely something that we've got used to, but we just can't wait to welcome the fans back and hopefully put on some good performances for them and get good results in front of our home crowd.

We can't wait for that day when we can welcome our fans back to Tranmere. That will be a good day.

THE AIM NOW IS TO FINISH AS HIGH UP THE TABLE AS POSSIBLE…

Yes, absolutely. It's about laying the foundations now for next season so that we are in the best possible place to start the new season, but it is also absolutely about pushing those teams above us.

We want to push Durham, Sheffield United and Leicester as hard as we can now in the back end of the season.

FA WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP TABLE (AS AT 28.02.21 – TOP TEAM ONLY IS PROMOTED)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
LEICESTER CITY	14	11	2	1	37	15	22	35
DURHAM	15	10	5	0	23	9	14	35
SHEFFIELD UNITED	15	8	4	3	30	12	18	28
LIVERPOOL	14	7	4	3	25	12	13	25
LONDON CITY	16	6	4	6	17	14	3	22
LEWES	14	5	3	6	11	16	-5	18
BLACKBURN	14	4	5	5	16	19	-3	17
CRYSTAL PALACE	15	4	4	7	22	25	-3	16
CHARLTON	13	2	4	7	12	20	-8	10
LONDON BEES	16	2	2	12	9	38	-29	8
COVENTRY UNITED	14	2	1	11	13	35	-22	7

THE REDS' REMAINING GAMES

MARCH
7 CRYSTAL PALACE (A)
28 BLACKBURN ROVERS (H)

APRIL
4 LEWES (H)
25 SHEFFIELD UNITED (A)

MAY
2 LONDON CITY LIONESSES (H)
TBC COVENTRY UNITED (H)



MAR/APR

WHAT'S ON



HEROES AND VILLANS

As the Reds approach the 'business-end' of the season, there are more big Premier League games on the horizon.

With work to do to ensure a top-four finish and Champions League qualification, Liverpool face a couple of tricky tests on the road before returning to Anfield on 10 April.

First up is a Monday-night trip to Wolverhampton Wanderers on 15 March with Liverpool looking to complete a double over Nuno Espirito Santo's men following their 4-0 victory at Anfield in December.

The same goes for the trip to Arsenal at the start of April, the Reds having beaten the Gunners 3-1 at Anfield back in September.

Jürgen Klopp's men will then be looking to avenge their heaviest defeat for years when Aston Villa visit L4 on 10 April. No Liverpool fan needs reminding of the 7-2 reverse in Birmingham last October – in fact, we can't believe we've just mentioned it!

MAR/APR

WHAT'S ON



NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Liverpool will be aiming to book their place in the quarter-finals of the Champions League when they play the second leg of their round-of-16 tie with RB Leipzig on 10 March.

Due to travel restrictions, the game will again be played at a neutral venue once more with the Reds aiming to build on their 2-0 first-leg advantage at the Puskas Arena in Budapest.

Should Jürgen Klopp's men prevail, all eyes will be on the draw in Nyon on Friday 19 March. Ties will be picked out for the rest of the tournament, so the semi-final draw will take place straight after pairings have been made for the last eight.

ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...

ANNIVERSARIES

95 years since crack forward Gordon Hodgson scored his first Liverpool FC goal on 10 March 1926.
24 years since the second epic 4-3 win over Newcastle United at Anfield on 10 March 1997.
12 years since the Reds beat Real Madrid 4-0 at Anfield in the Champions League on 10 March.
9 years since Steven Gerrard's derby hat-trick against Everton at Anfield on 13 March.
44 years since the legendary 3-1 home win against St-Etienne in the European Cup quarter-finals on 16 March.
25 years since the first epic 4-3 win over Newcastle United at Anfield on 3 April 1996!
16 years since Liverpool defeated Juventus 2-1 in the Champions League at Anfield on 5 April 2005.

And it's 40 years since Bruce Grobbelaar joined the Reds on 17 March 1981...

A few eyebrows were raised when Bob Paisley paid Vancouver Whitecaps £250,000 for a relatively unknown goalkeeper, especially as he had one of England's best at his disposal in Ray Clemence.

The showman in Bruce Grobbelaar was on display from the off as he twirled a ball on his fingertips for the cameras, but old hand Clemence vowed to keep the young pretender at bay.

"The best of luck to Bruce – I'll help him as much as I can – but there's no way I'm going to make it easy for him to take my place. I had to wait two-and-a-half years to get my chance when I first came here and I intend to make Bruce wait, too."

The Zimbabwean had a trial at West Brom in the summer of 1978 but couldn't obtain a work-permit, but he finally got his break in English football during a loan-spell at Crewe Alexandra in 1979/80.

Paisley was reportedly convinced about making his move after only a few minutes of watching the athletic goalkeeper in action at Gresty Road. He later travelled to Vancouver and spoke to Grobbelaar after a game against San Diego Sockers.

The keeper recalled: "Bob Paisley asked me: would I like to play for Liverpool? I said yes. He turned to Tom Saunders and said, 'That's it' and walked out of the office.

"I didn't know if I was to get signed or not! Six weeks later I was asked to come over and that's how it happened."

Bruce would join Clemence on the list of Liverpool's goalkeeping greats, winning 13 major honours and playing 628 games over the next twelve-and-a-half years.



BIRTHDAYS

Andy Robertson 27 on 11 March
Danny Murphy 44 on 18 March
Fernando Torres 37 on 20 March
Nat Phillips 24 on 21 March
John Toshack 72 on 22 March
Jerzy Dudek 48 on 23 March
Ozan Kabak 21 on 25 March
Gordon Milne 84 on 29 March
Harvey Elliott 18 on 4 April
Robbie Fowler 46 on 9 April
Sadio Mane 29 on 10 April
Thiago Alcantara 30 on 11 April





HISTORY MAKERS

Ian St John and team-mates parade the FA Cup before jubilant fans at a rainy Wembley in May 1965. "I can remember the game as if it was played the day before yesterday," he later said. "Our supporters were just awesome. Wembley had never heard anything like it – it sounded as if we were playing in front of the Kop."

WHAT'S IN



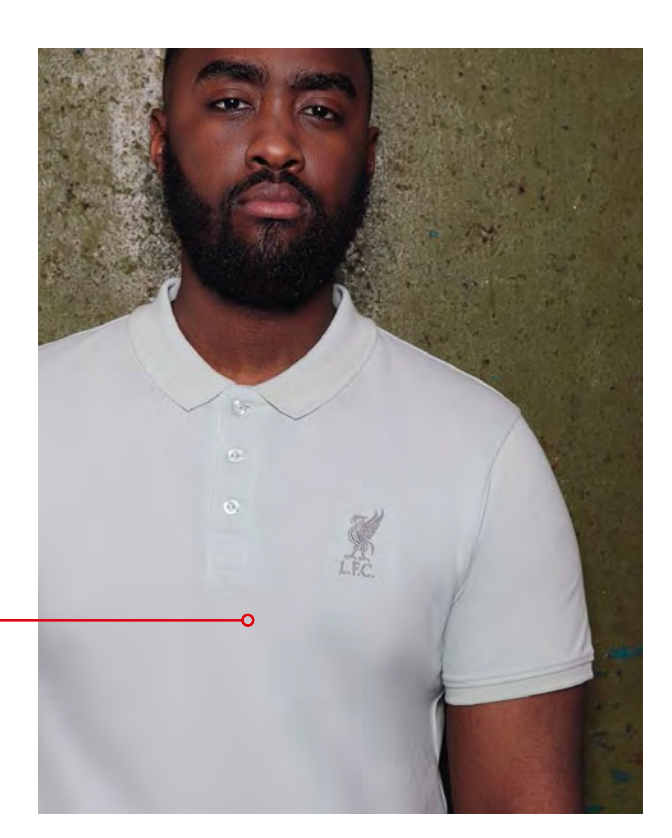
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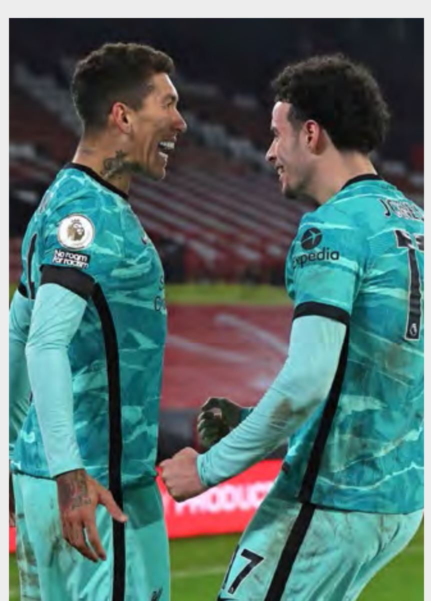
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Results & Fixtures 2020/21

AUGUST		SCORE	TV	SCORERS
Sat 29	Arsenal (CS, N)	1-1*	BT	Minamino (pens: Salah, Fabinho, Minamino, Jones)
SEPTEMBER				
Sat 12	**Leeds United (H)**	**4-3**	**Sky**	**Salah 3 (2 pens), Van Dijk**
Sun 20	Chelsea (A)	2-0	Sky	Mane 2
Thu 24	Lincoln City (Carabao Cup 3, A)	7-2	Sky	Shaqiri, Minamino 2, Jones 2, Grujic, Origi
Mon 28	**Arsenal (H)**	**3-1**	**Sky**	**Mane, Robertson, Jota**
OCTOBER				
Thu 01	**Arsenal (Carabao Cup 4, H)**	**0-0***	**Sky**	**(pens: Milner, Wijnaldum, Minamino, Jones)**
Sun 04	Aston Villa (A)	2-7	Sky	Salah 2
Sat 17	Everton (A)	2-2	BT	Mane, Salah
Wed 21	Ajax (UCL Matchday 1, A)	1-0	BT	Tagliafico (OG)
Sat 24	**Sheffield United (H)**	**2-1**	**Sky BO**	**Firmino, Jota**
Tue 27	**FC Midtjylland (UCL Matchday 2, H)**	**2-0**	**BT**	**Jota, Salah (pen)**
Sat 31	**West Ham United (H)**	**2-1**	**Sky**	**Salah (pen), Jota**
NOVEMBER				
Tue 03	Atalanta (UCL Matchday 3, A)	5-0	BT	Jota 3, Salah, Mane
Sun 08	Manchester City (A)	1-1	Sky	Salah (pen)
Sat 21	**Leicester City (H)**	**3-0**	**Sky**	**Evans (OG), Jota, Firmino**
Wed 25	**Atalanta (UCL Matchday 4, H)**	**0-2**	**BT**	
Sat 28	Brighton & Hove Albion (A)	1-1	BT	Jota
DECEMBER				
Tue 01	**Ajax (UCL Matchday 5, H)**	**1-0**	**BT**	**Jones**
Sun 06	**Wolverhampton Wanderers (H)**	**4-0**	**AP**	**Salah, Wijnaldum, Matip, Semedo (OG)**
Wed 09	FC Midtjylland (UCL Matchday 6, A)	1-1	BT	Salah
Sun 13	Fulham (A)	1-1	Sky	Salah (pen)
Wed 16	**Tottenham Hotspur (H)**	**2-1**	**AP**	**Salah, Firmino**
Sat 19	Crystal Palace (A)	7-0	BT	Firmino 2, Salah 2, Minamino, Mane, Henderson
Sun 27	**West Bromwich Albion (H)**	**1-1**	**Sky**	**Mane**
Wed 30	Newcastle United (A)	0-0	AP	
JANUARY				
Mon 04	Southampton (A)	0-1	Sky	
Fri 08	Aston Villa (FA Cup 3, A)	4-1	BT	Mane 2, Wjnaldum, Salah
Sun 17	**Manchester United (H)**	**0-0**	**Sky**	
Thu 21	**Burnley (H)**	**0-1**	**Sky**	
Sat 23	Manchester United (FA Cup 4, A)	2-3	BBC	Salah 2
Thu 28	Tottenham Hotspur (A)	3-1	BT	Firmino, Alexander-Arnold, Mane
Sun 31	West Ham United (A)	3-1	Sky	Salah 2, Wijnaldum
FEBRUARY				
Wed 03	**Brighton & Hove Albion (H)**	**0-1**	**BT**	
Sun 07	**Manchester City (H)**	**1-4**	**Sky**	**Salah (pen)**
Sat 13	Leicester City (A)	1-3	BT	Salah
Tue 16	RB Leipzig (UCL R of 16 1 A)	2-0	BT	Salah, Mane
Sat 20	**Everton (H)**	**0-2**	**Sky**	
Sun 28	Sheffield United (A)	2-0	Sky	Jones, Bryan (OG)
MARCH				
Thu 04	**Chelsea (H, 8.15pm)**		**Sky**	
Sun 07	**Fulham (H, 2pm)**		**Sky**	
Wed 10	**RB Leipzig (UCL R of 16 2 H, 8pm)**		BT	
Mon 15	Wolverhampton Wanderers (A, 8pm)		Sky	
APRIL				
Sat 03	Arsenal (A, 3pm)			
Tue/Wed 06/07	(UCL Q-F 1)		BT	
Sat 10	**Aston Villa (H, 3pm)**			
Tue/Wed 13/14	(UCL Q-F 2)		BT	
Sat 17	Leeds United (A, 3pm)			
Sat 24	**Newcastle United (H, 3pm)**			
Tue/Wed 27/28	(UCL S-F 1)		BT	
MAY				
Sat 1	Manchester United (A, 3pm)			
Tue/Wed 04/05	(UCL S-F 2)		BT	
Sat 08	**Southampton (H, 3pm)**			
Tue 11	West Bromwich Albion (A, 8pm)			
Sat 15	Burnley (A, 3pm)			
Sun 23	**Crystal Palace (H, 4pm)**			
Sat 29	(UCL final)		BT	



All fixtures subject to change. *lost 5-4 on pens

Premier League Champions?
Probably

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NEIL MELLOR

The disruption caused by injuries has affected the whole team but there has been plenty to be encouraged about too

When you have got some of the best players in the world in their positions it gives confidence to the rest of the team. Alisson in goal gives you confidence. Virgil van Dijk at the back gives you confidence. The front-three give you confidence.

But when you lose one or two key players in those positions to injury, that confidence can naturally drain. The other players start to think 'we've not got him there' and I believe that has seriously impacted Liverpool this season.

One of the knock-on effects has been a shortage of goals – and subsequently unusually poor results – at Anfield. The front-three have played a lot of games and the expectancy is always upon them to score, but the lack of goals from elsewhere in the team is an issue that needs to be resolved.

At the time of writing, ahead of Chelsea's visit to Anfield, Gini Wijnaldum is Liverpool's leading goalscorer from midfield in the Premier League with two goals. Jordan Henderson and Curtis Jones have both got one, and that's it. Hopefully those numbers will improve in the remaining games.

Last season Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain contributed eight goals in all competitions and it was hoped that Naby Keita could up his goal tally this year, but injury problems mean that hasn't happened.

Henderson and Fabinho have had to play at the back and the fact that no other defender has yet contributed more goals than Van Dijk – who scored five in the Premier League last season – since he was injured is also a problem.

The disruption caused by injuries has created changes in defence and midfield and it has felt unsettled, which doesn't help the players develop that understanding.

It would be unfair to point the finger at Thiago for not scoring, given his minutes on the pitch in comparison to some of his team-mates, but there has to be a collective responsibility to score goals and provide assists from midfield, particularly from those who play the most.

When a team stops scoring goals in the way that Liverpool have done at Anfield, people start looking at players' numbers and questioning their contribution. What gives me encouragement is that during the 2-0 win at Sheffield United, Curtis Jones almost played like a striker. He had the freedom to get further forward, played really well and scored the opening goal.

Jones is a player who has benefited from Liverpool's injury problems. He's perhaps had more game-time than he would have expected and has taken his opportunity, performing well to become a regular. He has also benefited from not going out on loan and having senior players and experienced coaching staff around him to ensure he understands what is expected of him at Liverpool Football Club.

Curtis has really kicked on for it and there's more to come from him. He's the type of player who can get into double figures in terms of goals from midfield, who can create chances for the front-three and who can be a midfield attacking option – as we've previously seen from Oxlade-Chamberlain and Keita – who makes that position his own.

I also expect the return of Diogo Jota from injury to make a big difference to Liverpool. It will be like having a new signing for Jürgen Klopp.

Jota settled in really well before getting injured and the only sad thing for him was there were no supporters inside Anfield to welcome him and celebrate his goals.

His return will freshen up the attack, allow the manager to give members of the established front-three a rest and also gives him the option of playing different systems, such as a 4-2-3-1 with Roberto Firmino in behind.

Having that variation in attack is important and it's no coincidence that Liverpool's struggles at Anfield have come since Jota was ruled out.

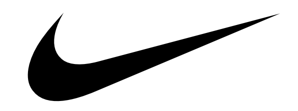
To get a player of his quality back will be a massive boost to both Liverpool supporters and the team because whereas confidence can drain when a key player is missing, it can also rocket when a player like Diogo Jota returns.



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